# 10 Days in 2009:

# An Auto-ethnographical Study of "Communal Resistance" Taken by International Students in Australia

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# Abstract

The early millennium saw the rise of an educational system in Australia where unchartered private educational provider institutions teach degree courses via contractual arrangements with parent universities. This study examines an incident where students at several such institutions collectively declined to submit a required online assessment piece to the possible detriment of the successful completion of their degrees. The research questions that arose from this incident were; what went wrong; how can we understand what happened here; and, what does this mean for me personally?

Students' perceptions of an online assessment piece are examined in the study of this incident. The study covers identical units offered at six private providers in three different Australian cities and the parent university. The students at the private institutions were all international students; those at the parent were a mix of international and domestic students. The assessment piece, a mandatory requirement for completion of the degree, was given to a collective cohort of approximately 400 students. The majority of students from four of the private institutions declined to submit the assessment piece. Initial research indicated that the students were uncomfortable with the format of a new blended-learning delivery introduced that year (2009). Upon deeper investigation, it was revealed that the declination to submit was, in fact, a complex situation involving conflicts, cultural clashes, social upheaval, and legislative misunderstandings that combined to create an environment where the students felt they had no option but to openly protest against perceived injustices.

The author of this work is also the educator at the centre of this event, thus the thesis has been written in an auto-ethnographical method, viewed through the educator's lens. To protect sensitive information, pseudonyms have been used and identifying details removed. The parent university at the centre of the event, named Newgarth University, is fictitious. Auto-ethnography has been used to present the empirical data (quantitative and qualitative), and the reader will be taken through a "detective story" that reveals various characters, plots, and protest.

The study documents a previously unrecorded incident in the international student education industry in Australia. The study offers explanations as to why this incident occurred and adds to the cumulative knowledge of the international student education industry in Australia by offering suggestions to prevent such incidents occurring again.

The study demonstrates that when a group of students are placed in an unfamiliar uncomfortable environment with little or no access to pastoral care or welfare services, they will create support groups of allegiance to protect their interests. These allegiance groups will employ tried and tested methods of communal resistance practised by the dominant culture of that field of endeavour.

# Statement of Authorship and Originality

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and the list of references of the thesis. No editorial assistance has been received in the production of the thesis without due acknowledgement. Except where duly referred to, the thesis does not include material with copyright provisions or requiring copyright approvals.

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DS.

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# *10 Days in April 2009: that could have happened this way.*

February 2009

The lecture theatre was an old relic of days gone by. It was tired, and damp. The air was thick, stale and smelled musty. It was a relatively small theatre with seating for around 80 people. About 60 staff were there by the time I arrived. We are seated in curved rows around a clearing at the front where the presenter would stand. The rows are tiered so that those at the back could see over the top of those in front. The room was inadequate for this arrangement so those sitting at the back had to stoop to avoid the ceiling. It was quite a comedy watching those staff bent over getting into their seats. The dimness of the room created a vision of ancient coalminers working in cramped mines. Once settled the impression of closeness was not dispelled. A claustrophobic feeling settled in the room. It seemed as if all the weight was in one place and the room threatened to tip on end like a badly balanced chair. The fixed chairs for their part, were like the old cinema seats contributing an appearance of an old music hall. They had cast iron frames screwed to the exposed hardwood floorboards and when people tried to walk or even shuffled their feet, the room echoed. The hard-padded, studded leather and flock, maroon coloured seats of the chairs folded up on springs to allow people to pass in the rows that had less than adequate leg room. They folded up with a clang when someone stood up, causing more than one staff member to miss their intended target as they gingerly reversed into the seating on the back row. Howls of laughter indicated yet another academic had bit the dust.

The seats did not provide facilities to write on, the likes of fold away tables and USB ports had not been invented when this facility was commissioned.[1] It was a very far cry from the amazing lecture theatre I had used in New Zealand to live stream classes to several different campuses simultaneously.[2] That theatre could sit 600 comfortably. There were two, 20-foot screens to ensure that participants could see everything. The lectern looked like the cockpit controls of an A380. It was here in this lecture theatre that my team and I recorded the live stream that I made, converted it to a playable format then posted it on the University's own version of Youtube. This had been done so that the international students who went home for the Christmas break (I never quite understood this, as most were not Christians) could continue with their study and not drop out as had previously been the case. I was in fact offering an unofficial online unit. It was very successful. Pass rates soared. Accolades followed. I was head-hunted!

The Head of School walked into the clearing at the front of the room, saying "Good morning" without breaking stride, bringing me back to the present. Someone trying to sneak in late fell over somebody's legs. There was a reverberating 'thump' and peals of giggling. The Head of School looked up with a disapproving glance. "Settle down please!"

"As you know we have just been audited by AUQA[3]. Their report was less than favourable[4]. We all need to up our game. The University is in the process of making some changes to accommodate the AUQA recommendations. One of these AUQA recommendations was that there needs to be a greater emphasis on blended learning. From today all units offered by the school must incorporate

[1] A generic lecture theatre. I have seen so many of these in the old Bluestone and Sandstone Uni buildings where law lectures seem to be located. This one is situated in Newgarth University a fictitious composite institution set in Victoria. Australia.
[2] This was Massey University's Albany Campus. New Zealand
[3] Australian University Quality Agency
[4] See section 4.4.

blended learning. We will achieve this by giving all students, those off and on campus, a CD[5] which contains a study guide, lecture slides and unit outline. Every coordinator must email this material in PDF format to Associate Professor Green for compilation into the CD, by next week." There was a pause. "Do not include any readings or any material other than that which you personally generate as there may be copyright issues." I raise my hand.

"Yes Darryl?" the Head of School asks without even looking up. A note of frustration in his voice.

"Providing material in an electronic form that can be distributed physically is not blended learning. Blended learning is an integrated process of using face-to-face teaching, electronic materials and assessment in a seamless pedagogical structure which enhances the student's learning experience." The Head sighs.

"There is quite a specific rollout process required for blended learning" I continue. "Battye and Carter at Uni of Canberra have just put out a report on this."[6]

There was a silence in the theatre thicker and heavier than the air. It was as if everyone in the room had held their breath at the same time.

"Not now. Darryl." The Head sort of breathed out. "We will talk about this later."

He continued.

"Now to the other matters that we need to attend to today…" The tedious day-to-day requirements of a new semester are discussed and merge into one another in droning monologue of which I hurriedly scribble a quick checklist for future reference. "…thank you, that is all for now" the Head concludes with. Then in what appears to be an after-thought as he is walking out the door, he glances over his shoulder "Darryl - may I see you in my office in 5 minutes please?" he asks.

The Head's office is directly under mine. Part of his room mimics the layout of mine, but then there is a conservatory section built on, which opens on to a terrace. The Head's room also has an en suite and a separate anteroom where his PA is situated. The head's PA, Stephanie, tells me to go into his office. He is sitting behind an oversize desk which is really too big for that portion of the room. He gestures me to a high-backed leather couch in the conservatory as he walks around the desk and joins me. He sits back into the corner of the couch facing me, leaning back, arms folded, and legs crossed. It is a pose that is supposed to look relaxed but comes across as defensive. "I know we have talked about all of this before Darryl, there is no need to go back over the history." *Images of the bussing incident, the year before, flash through my mind*[7]*.* He unfolds his arms and places one on his lap the other reached across the back of the couch. He assumes the position of openness. "I appreciate the work that you have done. It's been a bit rocky, but even AUQA is impressed with the turnaround. So, tell me what you want." He looks pleased.

"Let me write a unit that incorporated blended learning with contingent release modules on Blackboard and integrated assessments", I ask. "I can record the lectures and have them on line for students to review. They can work through modules at their own pace. Though the students at partners need the same unmetered access to Blackboard that students here have."

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[5] For those of us who can remember CD is the acronym for Compact disc. A data storage device.
[6] Battye, G. and Carter, H. 2009 Report on the review of Online and Blended learning. University of Canberra.
[7] See section 4.5.

"Well this is not a good time for this." The Head changes position and turns away from me. *That closes that door I think to myself as I note his body language.* Then he swings back. "There is a move to go from Blackboard to Moodle for our LMS. We could look at the access issue then." He leans forward." Why don't you wait until this has been finalised then work with the Moodle design team?"

"That sounds like a good idea. I would like that. However, …" I pause just to get his attention. "You know trying to get anything changed at a uni is like trying to turn the Titanic around at full steam; and we all know what happened there." The head grimaces. "How about you let me try a small online assessment? "I continue. "Because it will be so quick there should not be cost issues. I can then write about it and we can use this as a model for other units. I will ask that the partners do not penalise the sessionals monetary wise… term it as allowing the sessional staff to spend more productive time giving feedback. I will have to go and talk to everyone though." The Head looks down thoughtfully for a moment. "OK, but I want a report on a suggested rollout of blended learning, similar to the Battye report. Of course, we have specific problems achieving this across our partners unlike the Canberra report. Write a report based on what you observe and are able to achieve … Behave yourself with the partners!"

I grin and smile. "Thank you" and quickly close the office door behind me. I have about eight weeks to organise this.

Last week of March 2009.

*Darryl's interlude. A round of the meeting with the managers had been conducted. (See Chapter 6.2). I was feeling very uneasy at this stage. The online test was accepted, but only just. I admit I had not anticipated that there would be resistance to something that makes life better for everyone concerned. Anyway, that was immaterial. AUQA mandated this, so that was enough as far as I was concerned, and the test is ready to go. The unit outline tells how to access the test. I have written a question bank of 400 questions. I have held dummy runs and had great responses. The assessment will be open for seven days from midnight on Sunday at the end of teaching Week 4 to the midnight on Sunday at the end of teaching Week 5. It was simple, automatic. What could go wrong?*

March 29th, 2009.

*Darryl's interlude. Midnight. I am watching Blackboard from my home computer. At the stroke of midnight, the test is released as planned. I run a quick check with my student avatar. It opens. The instructions are there, and I get instant feedback from both correct and incorrect answers. I watch for a minute or two in the forlorn hope that someone may try it. Students work at all sorts of odd hours. No bites. Time for bed. There is nothing further that can be achieved tonight.*

March 30th, 2009.

*Darryl's interlude. It is about 4.30 pm on Monday and I am just organising my stuff to go home. There have been about 50 hits on the test but no submissions. I can only put this down to students looking at the instructions and trying to see if there are any clues in them. I know that my students on campus have a heavy lecture schedule on Monday and Tuesday (nobody wants to teach on Thursday and Friday and Wednesday afternoon is a common no teaching period so that PD sessions and meetings can be held on that day.) So, I expect the students will leave the test till after Tuesday when they have time. At the partners most of the students work, so they will probably wait till they are on campus for their lectures in the evening. I am concerned but not worried.*

March 31st, 2009.

*Darryl's interlude. Tuesday, 9.30pm. Late classes finished, time to go home. One last look at Blackboard. Still no change. Bother, (or words to that effect!). The road will be pretty quiet at this time of the evening, so it shouldn't take too long to get home. The GPS in my old Toyota (well really it is a Commodore with an identity crisis) in a broad Irish accent tells me that its 5.6 kilometres to home.* (I call the voice in my GPS Siobhan. Somehow, I find the accent comforting) *I should be there in 15 minutes if I get all the lights.* "Siobhan, call Sue please" *A quick phone call to Sue, so she knows I'm on my way and won't worry. Sue answers.* "Hello. How were the little darlings tonight?" *she asks.* "Fine, thanks. I'm on my way" *I reply. Sue starts to tell me about her day. She works for an RTO that is also being audited by AUQA. It is creating stress in her workplace. Sue is still talking to me when I pull up outside our rented house in Spotswood. Time for a quick meal before bed. I can check Blackboard again tomorrow.*

April 1st, 2009.

*Darryl's interlude. Wednesday, 7.30 am. April Fool's day. Another messy day. I have to prepare the feedback for the students' research proposals at this evening's International College classes.[8] The Channel 7 helicopter obliterates my thoughts as it comes in to hover over our house. They do the morning road report for the West Gate Freeway. Our house seems to be the target to hover over! So noisy. I go outside. They are so low this morning. The wash from the blades blows everything around in the yard. Well, no need to sweep this, this weekend. I wave to the pilot and he waves back. He is that close I can even see him grinning. Pleased to see it amuses him. Might ring civil aviation later I don't think he is allowed to go below 500 feet; he can't be more than 50 feet above the house. I take the number of the helicopter for good measure and go back inside. Sue has gone off to work in the Saab. I will prepare dinner in the slow cooker before I go into work about 11.30., that way we will have dinner when I get home. There are no classes this afternoon due to the common 'no teaching time'. I will be strong and look at Blackboard when I get to campus. I make another coffee and take the top essay from the pile on the couch. The helicopter gyrates off and silence descends. I sit down and look at the title of the essay in my hand. 'Is it time for Brodie's Law? An examination of the case of Brodie Panlock.'[9] I think that this could be very interesting.*

I walk down the corridor towards my office. I notice that Quinn's office door is open.[10] Hopefully I can nip past before he sees me. Quinn, at late 50ish, is just a little older than I am. A thin, unhealthy looking man, his long dark hair tied in a ponytail, the greyness at the temples displayed his age but in an untidy, not distinguished way. He is an Associate Professor. It took him 30 odd years to get there and only after he changed universities. He always seemed very annoyed that I made senior lecturer in five years and without a PhD. I remember my interview for Newgarth. It was conducted by video conference. When I negotiated a move from level B to level C academic for this role, Quinn walked out of the interview. The Head of School we had then, Margot, apologised profusely. She explained that there seemed to be some systemic issues within the law stream. It was hoped that my learning and teaching experience in rescuing underperforming units would be advantageous to Newgarth. I was chosen as I had experience and a Graduate Certificate in Teaching Development from the

[8] International College is a fictitious institution. The arrangement is that Newgarth University provide lecturers to enable International College to offer their degrees in Australia.

[9] Brodie Panlock was a waitress in a small café in Melbourne who committed suicide in 2006 over relentless bullying from other staff. There have been calls for the café owner to be held responsible under vicarious liability for her death. (Worksafe Victoria final bought charges against the café owner and staff who was fined $500,000 between them in 2010.)

[10] Quinn Phillip is the fictious Head of the law (HOL) stream at the School of Business Newgarth University. Newgarth do not offer a pure LLB degree. However most of the Business degrees offered by the school have at least one core law unit.

Teachers' College at Massey University. I pointed out that everyone at Massey had to undertake a similar certificate. Margot noted that this should probably be a requirement at Newgarth. She continued, if I was to accept the post, I could expect some transitional resistance. *Well she got that one right, I thought to myself*.

"Darryl, do you have a moment please?" Quinn's request was a commandment. Suddenly it felt like an invisible weight descended on my shoulders that I thought would push me through the floor. I straighten up under the weight, smiled friendly and put my head around Quinn's door frame.

"Good morning Quinn, you wanted to see me?" The students nicknamed him *Don* after Don Quixote. (Don Quinn-o-tee) I almost called him that, but I caught myself in time.[11]

"It's a bit late to be coming to work, isn't it?"

"Not really Quinn. I have been working on the research proposals for tonight's class at IC" I smile. "You know the class I give in Brunswick on Wednesday nights. I don't get home till gone 11 tonight." I keep smiling. "It makes for a 15-hour day if I have to start first thing"

Quinn huffs and turns away. "Whatever" he bristles. "I have been speaking to the Head. You didn't tell me about the online assessment in the MPA."

"No need to bother you with small details like this. AUQA will want us all to do this soon, so it is just a trial."

"I am the Head of the stream. I need to know everything in advance. Do not undermine my position" Quinn spluttered, pointing his finger at me.

"The Head approached me, Quinn. Could you take this up with him please?" There was a momentary startled look on Quinn's face that quickly changed to a look like a raging thunderstorm was brewing. "I will sort this out." I thought that Quinn was about to explode, "I will not have this." He jumps up and moves to push past me in the doorway. I step back. Smile again. "Have a nice day, Don. Let me know if you need any help." I wince when I realise what I said. It is no surprise that Quinn ignores me as he storms off downstairs, to tilt at more windmills.

Quinn's ideas are no secret. He has made these clear on numerous occasions. He has the opinion that regional universities like ours should stay regional. Everyone should stay within their catchment areas. He is also of the opinion that the education systems in some countries are not as sophisticated as that of Australia's. As a result, students from these countries cannot possibly participate in our education system. Any attempt to do so simply reduces the credibility of our system. As a colleague described Quinn, "He is really hard work."

My office is not too bad as academic offices go, I had a worse one in Wellington, New Zealand. That one was literally the broom cupboard, to the Chief Justice's office. Small but had compensations. I look around at the obligatory cheap vinyl veneered chipboard desk with double returns. There is a large corkboard behind the desk with the remains of good ideas perilously clinging on to the wall by the various pins. Sitting in the middle of the 'V' that the desk returns make, sits the equally cheap Dell desktop computer box and monitor. Phone, keyboard, mouse, and my R2D2 model, adorn this space. The desk top is clear of all other clutter. The desk takes up one corner of the room under a row of windows, on one side of the triangle this creates. The wall adjacent to the window and opposite to the desk has a row of sturdy metal filing cabinets of varying age and colour. The tops of the cabinets have become the unruly depository for dead computers, assorted books and boxes. The

[11] Don Quixote, a bit mad and tilting at windmills.

remaining wall has an expensive overstuffed, high-backed green leather sofa I bought from home. The opulence looks out of place in this functional setting. Above this is a whiteboard with scribblings from days gone by. The remainder of that wall is taken up by the door. When the door is open it just clears the desk completing the square space of my academic world. The saving grace to this world is a nesting pair of Rosellas that have taken residence on my window ledge. They have gotten used to me, I can even feed them, though they disappear if anyone else enters the room.

I settle into the cheap high-backed office chair at the desk and go through the ritual of the computer. Blackboard opens, I go to reports. I stare at the screen in disbelief. There were over 1,000 hits on the assessment. Yet less than 10% of the possible 367 students had submitted. Thirty-six students in total. Not even the complete class at Newgarth home campus. I stare at the screen so long I feel that I am in danger of getting sucked into it. I break the trance. I hit the speed dial on the phone. "Yep, I'm busy. Be quick. Some of us have things to do." Sue's voice crackles through the speaker. "Hello to you too, my dear" I quip. "The students didn't do the test."

"They are students. Real people. We are not all like you, you know, and attend every lecture and do every assessment four weeks in advance. That's just unnatural. They will do it at the very last minute. You know this. They will probably wait three weeks then plead and cry that you are being too hard on them and want another chance. You know what they are like. Don't worry about it. I've gotta go, a meeting…"

"Thank you my dear, I love you too. See you tonight. Dinner is cooking don't wait for me. See you later…" The line has gone dead.

The little back lane in Brunswick contains a secret; one it keeps very well. The lane looks like the access way to someone's garage. At the end hidden from Sydney Road, there is a large industrial roller door which gives access to what looks like a warehouse. Behind the door is a conference centre and research kitchens for a very large international fast food company. This is corporate image at its finest. The teaching facilities here are state of the art. The student chairs not only have power and USB ports, but it is possible to project to a screen from a laptop situated at the student chairs.[12] If we are discussing a student's work, it can be projected for all to see. The breakout rooms have free coffee and food from automatic machines. Often food from the experimental kitchen is left out for us to sample and give feedback. I occasionally take some home to Sue for supper. Finishing up after class, I log off on the automated security system. A female voice with no discernible accent says "Thank you, Darryl. The facility is secure and now in shut down mode. You have two minutes to exit the building. Have a good night." As I cross the lane to my Toyota, the roller door rattles shut behind me. I muse to myself that Newgarth should let me teach here full time. The facilities are way better. I push the button on my keys and unlock the car. Put the keys in the ignition, Siobhan's voice springs from the GPS "Good evening Dorryl." I wonder to myself, if I should introduce Siobhan to IC's security computer. Siobhan interrupts my thoughts. "Turty tree minutes to home" Siobhan informs me. "Truffic is lought."

"Siobhan, call Susan please. "The phone dials, then rings.

"Hi. Have you left yet?" Sue asks.

"Yep I'm on my way home. Siobhan says I will be home in thirty minutes."

[12] IPads were released the following year in January 2010. They were instantly incorporated into the IT setup at IC.

Sue laughs. “You know you should not listen to her. She always sends you around the houses and up the garden path. Sorry I was short today, very busy. It looks like AUQA is going to put us into probation.”

“Wow that’s serious.”

“Yes, so don’t go upsetting your boss anymore. One of us needs a job.”

“Who me?” I ask sarcastically. “When would I ever upset my boss?”

“I mean Don?”

“Oh yeah. Well, he’ll be happy. I bet he says, “I told you so” tomorrow. Anyway, I’ll be home in about 30 mins. Talk about ITexpress when I get there.”[13]

Sue was looking out of the side of the window blind when I pulled up outside.

April 2nd, 2009.

*Thursday, 9.00 am.*

I walk up the hallway to my office. I am relieved that Quinn’s door is closed. I throw my bags onto my desk. Today is my day at the community law centre. I always take way more stuff than I need for these days. Coffee is needed though; I didn’t get time this morning. Three times a week when Sue leaves for work I go for a run. Across the rail tracks, past the Scienceworks museum and the pumping house where they filmed the Mad Max movie, turn right and follow the river to Williamstown. This morning I got so focussed on the test in Blackboard I didn’t notice the time. I had run all the way around Gellibrand Head to Williamstown Beach, a good run but I was a bit short on time by the time I returned home.

I walk to the staff room, fill up and plugged in the electric jug. I reminisce that I am not at IC with the automatic expresso machines and take my instant coffee back to my room. The computer ritual is begun. I sit back and sip my coffee. I open Blackboard. My heart sinks. Twelve-hundred hits. Fifty-one submissions. I am still over 300 submissions short. The average time on the test was two minutes 10 seconds, this was just a little short of the time that the volunteer dummy students took. Though it was not possible - or at least should not be possible - to enter the test more than one for each student. So, the maximum numbers of hits should only be 367. So how do I get four times that number? I reached for the phone and called Tim my friendly Blackboard advisor.

“Hey Tim, how are you today?” I ask.

There was a cheerful voice on the other end of the line “I’m impressed.” A New Zealand accent was very noticeable. Funny I never noticed the accent when I lived there. Now it stands out. “It’s Thursday, I expected to hear from you on Monday” Tim laughed.

“Thank you for your support and boosting my insecurity Tim.” I replied sarcastically but playfully. “So, tell me. I’ll bet you have been monitoring this.”

“Yep. You made a mistake!” My heart sank to its lowest point possible. There was a laugh on the other end of the line. “Are you still breathing?” Tim asked. “Oh good. I’m not giving you the kiss of life.”

[13] ITexpress is the fictional name for the IT training company Sue worked for. It went into receivership in 2009 after AUQA sanctions were placed on its operations. Sue was made redundant.

"You mentioned a mistake?" I said quietly.

"Yes. You set it up wrong."

"I followed your instructions to the letter" I protested.

"Oops they may have been wrong then. No problem."

"All you can say is Oops?"

"Ok what has happened is that it should be set up so that once a student enters the test it automatically submits, once the student logs out or it times out. The student cannot go back in once it has been sat. Right?"

"Right."

"Well, what has happened is that the students can enter as many times as they like. They are only blocked once they submit. But the submission is not automatic. They have to click the submission button."

"Great. That is just brilliant. So, they get as many tries as they like, not just one."

"Well, yes" Tim replies, "but they get a different test every time. So, what's the problem?" I suddenly realise he is right. When I checked the test with my avatar on Sunday night, it allowed me to log out without submitting. Of course, if *I* can go back into the test, so can every other student.

I lean with elbows on the desk my hands pressed together as if praying, cupping my face. "Thanks Tim. I have to think about this."

"No problem. I truly don't see it as an issue though."

As I hang up, the phone rings instantly. "Hello Darryl, its Stephanie." I groan to myself. "The Head would like to see you this afternoon, please." That's Steph, I think to myself - all business. Didn't even wait for a reply.

"Sorry, Steph, I am at the CLC this afternoon."

"No problem Darryl, I have you booked in at 9 am tomorrow for a breakfast meeting. Please be punctual. You like large lattés, don't you?" Steph hung up before I could reply.

Great, I think to myself. I return to leaning with elbows on the desk and my hands pressed together as if praying, cupping my face. And now for a fun-filled afternoon of bad tenants, drunks and druggies.

April 3rd, 2009.

*Darryl's interlude, Friday, 8.45 am.*

*I arrive at work a little early. I had checked Blackboard at home. There was almost no change in the number of submissions since yesterday. I had decided that Tim's advice was the only way I could go. It made no difference how many times the students looked at the test it was only the one that was submitted that counted. I had printed off the Blackboard reports and made three copies. I was in no illusion that Quinn was going to be at the meeting and I would have to defend myself. If things had gone well the Head would back me up. As it was … who knows?*

Stephanie was just settling in when I arrived at the anteroom. “Go straight in, Darryl. Your coffee is on the coffee table. The Head is expecting you.”

“Ah. Darryl. Come on in. Sit down.” The Head waves me to the couch. “Quinn will be joining us later.” I try to look surprised. It obviously didn’t work. “Come on now, Darryl. You know how this works. When Quinn makes a complaint, I have to at least hear it before I dismiss it.”

“So, what is it this time?” I ask. “Am I being subversive and plotting to overthrow the Government?”

“Nothing so grand, just the faculty.” The Head waves his hand in a gesture of declaration like he is a waiter offering a plate of food.

“That’s not actually a bad idea. I vote we move to IC in Brunswick.”

The Head smiles. “Not a bad idea. But keep that one to yourself. You know Quinn has never been there.”

“Quinn refuses to go to any of the partners. I am sure he thinks he will be contaminated … or worse, proved wrong.” The Head winces. I continue. “How do you justify his actions? You know he still fails students simply because they are at the partners.”

“But it is not racism, as he passes students in his class here.”

I reply, “it is still discrimination.”

“Possibly, but location is not a ground for a discrimination action.”

“Well, it certainly is not equivalence as required by AUQA.”

“Now that is true … this is where you come in. How’s the test going?” The Head asks.

“I was hoping you wouldn’t ask” I said sheepishly.

The Head’s eyes opened wide. I tell him the story.

“You know Quinn is going to use this as evidence that he is correct, don’t you?” The Head looks at me as if I have just placed a bomb in his lap.

“Did I hear my name mentioned?” We both turn to see Quinn in the doorway.

“Ah, Quinn, I was just explaining to Darryl that you feel there is a lack of transparency occurring. Come on in. Darryl wants to explain to you what has been happening and how I’ve asked him to investigate our next move in how we respond AQUA’s report … Tell Quinn your story. Darryl.”

April 4th, 2009.

*Darryl’s interlude. Saturday, 7.30 am.*

*I had promised Sue that we would get away for the weekend. An AQUA audit was causing big problems at her work, as well. It was quite stressful. My situation was not helping either. I thought we both needed to get away. I planned an overnight trip down the Great Ocean Road to Portland then up to the Grampians and home via Daylesford. I had everything packed and planned. All ready to go. Siobhan had been transferred from my car to the Saab. Directions to Geelong drifted through the car in her familiar Irish accent. Next stop breakfast at Lorne. Just as we pull into the parking area on the Lorne foreshore Sue looks at her phone and turns deathly white. She looks up, “ITexpress* have gone

into receivership. I have been made redundant.*" She was quiet for a while.* "You know we may not get the money they owe me, don't you?"

"You are a priority creditor, "I explain. "They have to get your money first … well second, the lawyers always get theirs first."

Sue laughed. "You know you are in the wrong job, don't you?"

"I know, but you didn't like me when I was a lawyer. Let's get breakfast - it might be the last one for a while."

April 5th, 2009

*Darryl's interlude. Sunday, midnight.*

*I have this weird feeling of déjà vu. I am watching Blackboard from my home computer. At the stroke of midnight, the test closes as planned. I run a quick check of the report. One thousand, five hundred and seventy-six hits but only eighty-one submissions. I will have to run individual checks to see who and where these submissions were from. It has been a long weekend though I do not have the energy for this. Time for bed. There is nothing further that can be achieved tonight.*

April 6th, 2009.

Monday morning, I settle into my office. I have the priority of the week's lectures to organise. I push the on button of the computer, log onto the system then, almost automatically log into Blackboard. There is a knock on my open door just as the app opened and I look up to see who is there. The Head was stood in the doorway. "Good morning, you look tired." The Rosellas scatter in a flurry of wings. The Head looks out of the window, puzzled at the movement.

"Sue and I went away for the weekend, up to the Grampians," I replied. "The RTO Sue works for went into receivership at the weekend after AUQA put them on probation. It was not the relaxing weekend I had planned."

"Humm. AQUA are showing they have teeth."

"I think it is good though. ITexpress was really dodgy. Sue was really struggling with the ethics of working there," I said, opening the reports in Blackboard.

The Head looks at the computer's monitor. "Well, how did it go?"

"Well… not too good, at the moment." I drew out the words in an exaggerated evasive manner. "I've have had a few hits, but nowhere near as many as there should be. From what I can see I am about 280 replies short." I tried to make this sound offhandish and casual. "I will have to go into the individual students' results to see where the missing submissions are. This may take some time."

"Well, that is disappointing. Was it possible there was an issue with Blackboard being down?"

"No," I replied. "I have been monitoring it night and day since last Sunday." I moved the mouse to select the correct reports from Blackboard. "From what I can see everyone here on campus has submitted without a problem. It seems the partners are a little light on submissions. I will have to look into this."

"Well, keep me posted and then to get back to me; as quick as you can please." With that the Head was gone, striding off down the corridor. I return to the computer in a little state of panic. What has happened? How could there be 283 replies short? I reach for the phone with the thought of trying

to call Brent, the lecturer at partner C in Sydney. He may know of some issue. He is a lawyer and his office tell me he is in court all day. They will take a message and ask him to get back to me. Brent is notorious for his inability to return calls. I do not expect to hear from him, at least till his secretary forces him to call… probably tomorrow. I call Shan. Shan is the lecturer at Partner D. I do not expect him to answer - he is always so busy. I have the greatest respect for Shan. He is a lovely, quietly spoken man with a very thick Sri Lankan accent. I don't think I have ever heard him say a harsh word about anyone. I often think how much I admire his even temper. I just wish I was like that. But no, I am the passionate, volatile type. It often gets me into trouble. I laugh to myself then realise my door is still open and embarrassed, quickly look up to see if anyone is passing. No one there. With another little smirk I get back to dialling. Shan was originally from a village way in the back of nowhere. He built his own house with bricks he made from the clay he dug out of the ground. Taught himself maths from a book that he read by candle light. Then got a job working for the UN where he rode a motorbike into a Tamil rebel camp to negotiate their help with local fishermen who were suffering because of political tensions in the area. People write books about people like him and yet here he was an immigration agent and teaching law part time. The phone rings twice. To my surprise Shan answers.

"Darryl, my friend." His thick accent almost creates a melody as he speaks. "How wonderful to hear from you. My family were just asking after you yesterday. They want to know when you and Sue are coming back to visit. Adele wants to show Sue her new toys." I smile to myself again at the thought of my wife who is self-confessed non-maternal (well in her dreams, if not in reality) siting on the floor playing dolls with this so cute and petit five-year-old. "Shan my friend, I am so pleased I caught you. Tell Adele, Asindu and that lovely wife of yours that we will visit next time we are in Sydney. How is Hameesa's GP certificate going?"

"She is going very well. In a few months she will be qualified to practice on her own. We will be able to go anywhere we want then."

"Don't tell me that I will lose you Shan," I protest.

Shan laughs. "No chance, you are the older brother I never had. You will not lose me." He laughs again.

"On a serious note, Shan, may I speak to you about the assessment in the commercial law unit?" I ask.

"Of course, my friend." The melody in his voice cheerfully jingles along as he speaks. "I feel that it hasn't happened the way you would have liked. I haven't heard much. Though… despite your efforts there is always the division between Melbourne and Sydney. The students still have a resentment at being dictated to, as they see it, by a university they have no connections to. They are still very suspicious. I am afraid your role as academic misconduct officer does nothing to dispel this distrust." There is a pause on the end of the phone. "I have heard a faint whisper, that the Indian Students' Association are making waves. They seem concerned about student safety, especially in Melbourne, with the recent attacks. Though I do not know how much substance there is to this rumour. They are very organised. I am not sure what is going on or how this affects what we are doing, but for some reason this seems to be affecting the students. They seem agitated. I have no idea if this is connected to the test… it is just a feeling… You know what they are like. A few vocal ones, and the rest follow like sheep." The sparkle in his voice is fading now. His accent becomes thicker causing me to strain to understand. "The groundswell seems to be coming from one of the universities in Melbourne." Shan seemed to think for a minute. "You are on the ground there. The Melbourne students trust you. You should talk to them. Be gentle my friend…" there is a pause… "Be safe." There is a warmth in his voice, but this now seems to be of concern.

"Always, my friend." I laugh, "Always." I try to be light-hearted. "Bye now and give my love to the family."

"I will." There is a click and the line goes silent. I hold onto the phone, thinking, just a little too long and the beeps come on the line. Pulled back to reality with a start, I hang up the phone, sit back in my chair and run my hands down my face. I take a deep breath and say out loud. "So, what's the next move Darryl?"

"You talking to me?" The Rosellas leave in a startled flurry. Quinn is standing in my doorway and visions of the movie *Taxi-driver* flow into my Head.[14] I vividly see images of Robert de Niro asking the mirror, "Are you talking to me?" In my Head I see the sneer on De Niro's face as he challenges the mirror; Head slightly back, chin raised, eyebrows raised and a defiant, ugly look of disdain.

I shake my Head to clear the image. Quinn takes this as a reply to his question. He continues "Just saw the Head" he jeers. "Your little experiment didn't work it seems. Hardly surprising. You know my thoughts on this." I think of Shan and his quiet even temperament. I supress the urge to bite back. Instead, in my best mediating manner, I turn towards him, lean my Head to one side, elbow on the desk, and I rest my chin on my fist in *the thinker* position.[15] I offer a knowing smile. "We are all entitled to an opinion… no matter how wrong it is," then calmly turn away to dismiss him. Inside I am boiling and ready to explode.

Two coffees and walk around the campus later I have a plan.

First let's see the extent of the damage. Get into Blackboard and find out just who has not submitted. Then I need to get in touch with Gitika.

Gitika was one of my students at partner C.

April 7th, 2009.

It was starting to get dark earlier about the beginning of April as I drive my old Toyota into the city. It is a bit beaten up, but it is very cheap to run on LPG. That is a big consideration given the miles I drive between the campuses, partners and other institutions where I perform my community outreach. I hate driving in Melbourne. Drivers here are so aggressive; and don't even get me started on hook turns. The thought of waiting till the light turns red, then playing chicken with trams and cars coming in the other directions petrifies me. All you hear are horns blowing. I was enduring this as I had arranged to meet with Gitika at Partner C in Melbourne CBD this evening. The next task was to get there. I avoided the motorway and came into town through the back of the docks. This way I could get straight into town and into the parking building at the back of partner C. No hook turns and at this time of the evening there would be no trouble parking. There was an alleyway (it is Melbourne after all) between the parking building and the next street where Partner C was situated. There were a good number of RTO's in this area - I knew of 22 personally and of course several of the large universities had presences in this area. This meant that food and coffee would be easy to find.

Gitika was waiting for me in the foyer to Partner C. It was very unusual to see her without the ever-present entourage. At first, I was surprised, she seems very small and petite, even vulnerable, standing alone in the foyer. She is slim, in her late 20's, and about 158 cm tall (or 5 feet, 2inches for those of us who still measure people in feet and inches). There was a cool bite in the air, so she had

[14] Taxi Driver. 1976; Directed Scorsese, Written Schrader, Staring Robert De Niro, Jodie Foster, Harvey Keitel, Cybill Shepherd

[15] The Thinker. Rodin. 1880.

on a long dark woollen coat, over a knee length fawn suit dress or is it a dress suit? Anyway, it was a dress with a matching jacket. She has very fair, just slightly olive skinned with fine Mediterranean facial features and long raven-coloured hair that she wears straight and fell to the middle of her back. It was only when she spoke that it became obvious, she was not Mediterranean. It was in a Mumbai accent that said, "I have just finished work." There was an absence of the usual sparkle present in her voice when she spoke to me. It was a flat, low tone that one would use to scold a puppy. "You can buy me a coffee next door then we will go and talk to the others." I stifled a smile. The entourage were not far away. With that order Gitika seem to grow back to her usual size a bit like Alice in Wonderland. I couldn't help smiling at that thought. Seeing the smile, Gitika's eyes narrowed a little. She turned on her heel and whooshed out of the automatic glass doors.

"How's Mrs Darryl?" Gitika askes as I ordered coffee. *Mrs Darryl* is Gitika's name for Sue. "Fine thanks. She is well." Gitika used to meet Sue sometimes when I taught at Partner C. Sue would work late, come to meet me at Partner C and we would travel home together. They had a good rapport. It was this rapport that led to Gitika becoming my *sponsor.* In ethnographic terms, a sponsor is a member of a closed group that will take the ethnographer along to the group and vouch for their credibility[16]. In Gitika's case, this sponsorship came at a price. I am not entirely gullible and I long ago realised that our friendship was convenient to Gitika and would probably only last as long as she thought I would be useful to her. Because of this I was constantly aware that our friendship should never be seen as anything more than an academic association. For this point I was very pleased with Gitika's rapport with Sue and Gitika's ever present entourage. We took our coffees and walked back to Partner C. On the third floor, there was a large alcove area outside the lecture theatre. It was plate glass on two sides giving views over the CBD. One side of the alcove buttressed the lecture theatre, this was wood panelling with a serving area. The last side of the alcove was open to the theatre's atrium. There were four comfortable, over-stuffed sofas set out in a square with a chrome and glass coffee table between them. Inset downlights in the stained, wooden ceiling around a small but tasteful chandelier gave the impression of this area being anything but a student lounge area. The area was very comfortable and plush. It would be at home in the lounge area of a club or casino. The others were waiting here. There were six of them in total. Lovepreet was a tall, well-built, handsome young man, very quietly spoken with a smile that could disarm anyone. I am not a small man but always felt quite diminutive in his presence. He smiled, flashed his perfect white teeth and took my hand warmly. "Good to see you Professor," he beamed. The others sitting around the sofas smiled and greeted me. The other three young men, Shubam, Kirim and Sukhvir all stood to shake my hand. The two young women Manpreet and Anan smiled and waved enthusiastically from where they were sitting. "It is very nice to see you all again," I smiled and greeted them. "I thank you for coming here tonight but I truly did mean to drag you out."

"When Gitika told us you wanted to know about the test we thought we would come to help. You have been a great help to us it is the least we can do," Lovepreet beamed again. The others nodded, well not quite nodded; they shook their Heads in agreement in that Indian way where a person's Head sways from side to side.

Diminutive Gitika and giant Lovepreet were in some ways a mismatched couple, though in other ways they were a powerful combination. Gitika was a strong forceful person and no one was going to challenge her as long as Lovepreet was there. With the three other boys as his lieutenants, I can imagine that this gentle giant would be almost unstoppable. Together they had rescued Manpreet

[16] Flood. J, 2007.

and Anan from unscrupulous business people.[17] I settled on one of the couches next to Anan. “You and Sue have not been in to get pizza from my restaurant,” Anan said.

“One day, Anan. We don’t get into Geelong that often.” I smile at the others. “So, tell me what I did so wrong with this test?”, I asked.

“How unfair is it to be give different tests? The students got so frustrated with it they just gave up. We trusted you, Darryl, and you let us down.” Gitika spilled out. I had seen her angry before but not at me.

“That is a bit harsh Gitty, the Professor is just trying to help,” Lovepreet interjected. “He really helped the students here. He cares, you know that.” He turned to me. “I told her you were trying to help. Gitty thinks you have turned against us.” There was a chorus of “come on, Gitty” and “settle down Gitty, it’s the professor.” Slowly Gitika smiled. She sat forward and looked at me. Lovepreet smiled and settled back on to the couch.

“Ok, you didn’t mean to hurt anyone, but it was still unfair … “

I was accepted back into the group and the conversation rolled on.

[17] See section 6.3 and the girls who spoke after the Melbourne focus group.

# *Chapter 1*

## 1.1 Introduction

> *The 'truth' is that we can never fully capture experience. What we tell is always a story about the past. (Ellis, 2004, p. 116)*

This thesis, for reasons that will become obvious later, is written in the form of a narrative, an ethnographical narrative. It is a story of trial and error and my research journey – in reality my personal journey - from 2007 to 2011; usually with more error than success. The story though, starts in the middle. To be precise in 2009. A small, 10-mark online assessment task was set for a cohort of students. Approximately 280 of these students, all international students, declined to submit that assessment. When the problem occurred, it was very much a surprise to me. While in the scheme of things, a small, 10-mark test being ignored by students seemed quite insignificant amongst the social, political, and financial problems of the times, it did however, cause me great concern. As this was a compulsory assessment, for a compulsory unit, failure to submit effectively meant the students had failed the unit; and possibly thrown away their degrees, with all the hard work, money and sacrifice that went with it. It was an issue to me, as a teacher, that I could not understand and yet, felt I should have foreseen the possibility of it happening. These students had a history. Previously they had struggled to pass units. To many of them, this occurred at great personal expense. I had previously stood up and fought for these students against what I saw as an injustice. I had worked with these students to improve their situation in Australia in a time of political uncertainty and unrest. Once it had happened, it caused me great consternation as to how I could understand the problem to prevent its reoccurrence.

The students were studying, at several of what are now commonly referred to as partner institutions of a particular university, which I will name Newgarth University (See section 1.7 for Terms and Definitions). These partner institutions are devices by which universities can extend their operations to areas that would not normally be possible to them in order to secure precious financial resources. I was introduced to the concept of teaching at partner institutions in 2007. It was evident at this time that there were inherent problems in the partner institutions system in its fledgling days. The incident this thesis examines did not occur until 2009 after I had been teaching within the system for over two years. Blended learning (an integrated mix of online and face-to-face teaching) had just been introduced by the school of business at the university where I was employed, when, approximately 280 students declined to submit for assessment a small online test (Battye & Carter, 2009). Just 10 days in April 2009 was all the time that it took for me to realise that the assessment had been rejected and to start in motion a research project that would last seven years.

In this study, I adopt an autoethnographical method to analyse my story in terms of the culture of international students who study in Australia. Autoethnography is the research (graphy) of self (auto) in relation to the culture (ethno) the researcher is immersed in (Chang, 2008). Chang offers that "autoethnography shares the story telling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and in interpretation " (Chang, 2008 p. 43). This method is particularly appropriate as not only am I the author, researcher, educational designer and teacher; I too am an international student studying in Australia. I have intimate knowledge of that culture. I am also fortunate that I have firsthand primary data, from notes, diaries, reports and conversations with other actors together with first hand memories and observation of the events. In true ethnographic tradition I have where possible triangulated this data with other artefacts.

“10 Days in April 2009: that could have happened this way” is a dramatized “autoethnographical fiction” depiction of the introduction of a small academic test to a cohort of students (Ellis, 2004, p 251). The introduction of the test and its opposition were very real. With the exception of myself and my dear wife, Sue, the actors and places are composites to camouflage true identities. This process of de-identification does not detract from the truth contained in the story. As Carolyn Ellis (2004) claimed, the composites of people are the personas needed to “make the story lifelike within the parameters of what could/did happen” and within the constraints of ethical consideration for privacy (Ellis, 2004, p 251). The story displays the contrast between a dilapidated, badly funded university and some of the plush partner providers it deals with, in the form of Partner C and The International College. The story introduces AUQA, the government watchdog. Sue is seriously disadvantaged when the AUQA requirement causes the RTO where she was employed to go into receivership. The University is also attempting to fulfil obligation to AUQA. The threat of remedial sanctions hangs over the University like the Sword of Damocles. However, there is ever-resent internal resistance to these obligations. This resistance seems to hamper the university and place it well behind the technology of others in the field. The desire to maintain a status quo is seriously damaging the University. It creates conflict and frustration. There is the conversation of the woefully inadequate attempt to comply with AUQA requirements. The story draws comparison of the incorrect prejudicial preconception of some academic staff to the actual reality of the students, their abilities and their lives in Australia. The story displays the emotional conflict that the situation presents. The Head is in emotional conflict between what he knows is right and his physical inability to change things. The emotional concern of Sue as to the consequences of AUQA’s actions. And, too, the turmoil I faced at the rejection of the people I had come to consider friends and the rejection of what was ostensibly a compromise. The emotional and physical scenes having been set, the story sets the geographical (fictional) scene. The story grounds the study in a composite location that of Spotswood which can be seen from movies such as MadMax, Spotswood and Romper Stomper, giving it an air of reality and solidity (Joffe, 1992; Miller, 1979; Wright, 1992). I remember once going to see an exhibition of a world-renowned photo realistic artist, Graham Sydney. The paintings are very large canvases with images that look as if they are printed directly from a camera. I stared long and hard at three paintings. They were of a remote area I knew intimately in New Zealand. They were recognisable… but there was a feeling that they were just wrong. After about an hour of my staring at these paintings I became aware of someone standing beside me. The man asked me why I looked puzzled? I told him that these were excellent paintings however it would not be possible to see a particular mountain from the location of the view point. The man gently put his arm around my shoulder, handed me his business card… declaring him to be the artist… and asked, “Does that make the paintings any less real?” I offer that I too, like Sydney, am providing a view point for the reader, and adding those things which are normally invisible to the composition, for clarity.

In the weeks following the test, I discovered an academic study that had suggested, in any group of students, a percentage would not be comfortable with blended learning (Akkoyunlu & Yilmaz-Soylu, 2008; Skelton, 2009). Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz-Soylu’s (2008) study findings suggest that approximately 25 per cent of students will attempt to avoid blended learning if possible. The study was conducted in Turkey with domestic students of that country. Skelton had conducted a similar study at an institute in New Zealand again with, it is presumed, domestic students (2009); though unfortunately under less stringent conditions. The New Zealand study did seem to confirm the findings of the Turkish study. However, the situation in which approximately 280 international students displayed such avoidance at several different locations simultaneously had not, to the best of my knowledge, previously been reported. I was not dealing with homogenous groups in a specific domestic location. I had initially suspected that financial, political and educational circumstances had created a bizarre convergence of hundreds of students, who were not comfortable with online education, in one place at the same time. Simply put, it seemed possible that a particular market of students had been

targeted for the university that saw 100 per cent of the mix being students who would avoid blended learning instead of a suggested normal 25 per cent.

I decided to instigate a case study of my own to determine if this suspicion was correct. This first study began as a simple survey to determine the factors that may have deterred students from accepting the introduction of a simple online assessment task in 2009. Similar surveys had been discussed in previous studies (Akkoyunlu & Yilmaz-Soylu, 2008; Battye & Carter, 2009; Brown, 2001; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Skelton, 2009). This original study was not intended to be anything other than a means to understand the incident and to prevent its reoccurrence. It was not until later in 2009 that I realised there was a much deeper-seated problem to this incident. I was encouraged at that time to change my PhD topic from law (Taxation of Australian Indigenous Corporations) to that of education and take this case study on as the subject. The renewed PhD study drew on a range of sources and theoretical viewpoints that are explained in the following chapters. The study, rather than a simple examination of empirical data collection and analysis, became an autoethnographic journey through teaching international postgraduate students in commercial law at an Australian university. My story, though, had started two years previously in 2007 when at that time the students were incredibly suspicious of the parent university, Newgarth University.

The international students I encountered had come to Australia to study accounting. Accounting was at the time an occupation that could give an applicant for permanent residency (PR) in Australia an advantage. The acquisition of an accounting degree would go a long way towards a successful application for PR. When I was introduced to the partner institutions, the students were failing their courses at the rate of 100 per cent of students per semester. The students were at a loss to understand why they were failing. They were understandably upset that the funds they had put aside for an Australian education were rapidly being depleted, with no end in sight for successfully gaining a degree. My first two years of contact with these students were spent in identifying why there was a disparity in the success rates between international students studying at the partner institutions and the international students studying at the home campus of Newgarth University, who were achieving in the region of an 80 per cent success rate.

For reasons of confidentiality and business sensitivity, while grounded in reality, the account of 10 days in April 2009, is a fictitious account. The identities of the institutions involved in this study cannot be revealed. It is therefore necessary to use pseudonyms. Newgarth University, the Australian university at the centre of the study, is an amalgam of several universities. It is a fictitious institution named after the equally fictitious jurisdiction of Newgarth in Lon Fuller's famous jurisprudential study, *The Case of the Speluncian Explorers* (Fuller, 1949). To create this amalgam, I have drawn on my own personal experience. I personally have studied at no less than seven such institutions, have worked, in some capacity or other, for a further twelve such institutions. I have as part of my duties for a specific commission examined and benchmarked a further 15 institutions.

Continuing on the fictitious institution theme, the equally fictitious partner institutions have been named A, B, C, D and International College (IC). Partner C had campuses in Melbourne and Sydney. Partner D had campuses in Sydney and Adelaide. These, too, are amalgams of several such institutions. There are as of 2017, 1,319 private partner institutions registered with the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) in these cities. Any similarity to these institutions is coincidental. Details of any individuals and places have also been changed in order to protect their privacy. The cities of Hobsons Bay (Spotswood), Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Wyndham have been used to ground this study geographically, and to coincide with academic writing and triangulate with the media reports of the unrest in these cities.

For legal requirements, the matters presented here are an expression of my true and honest opinion and my interpretation of events and materials. I present my opinion based on the materials cited and that my opinion is related to the public interests. No harm is intended to any institution or to any persons living or dead. Any similarity to any persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

The use of fictional auto-ethnography as has been used in this thesis is examined and explained in section 3.2. I accept the constructive criticism that the use of these methods makes it difficult to identify what is based on data and what is invention. The observations and data in this study are not invention. What has been retained is the key truths about the *processes* (Humphreys & Watson, 2009). What is fictional are the names, dates, locations and identifiers. This is to protect the innocent. Carolyn Ellis suggested that auto-ethnographical stories to have impact must be lifelike within the parameters of what could/did happen (Ellis, 2004, p 251).

This story is of the journey I personally took with the cohort of students from the point where they were failing units in droves to where they were achieving comparable pass rates to students at the home campus. These students were studying towards a Masters of Professional Accounting degree (Campanella et al. 2008). The course would normally take four teaching periods, or two years of full-time study, to complete.

My first contact with this cohort of international students was at the beginning of their second year. Most had failed several units of the course, and all had failed the compulsory law units. Many were now repeating their first year of studies. Others were unable to move forward as they had not passed units that were prerequisites for subsequent units. The majority of these students graduated late in 2010 after three or four years of study. I was very pleased to attend their graduations. Sadly, many students simply ran out of money and returned to their home countries before they completed their courses. I, too, left Newgarth University at the beginning of 2011. Much of the study, which is the subject of this thesis, revolved around my relationship with these students and the profound effect they had on me.

The story is difficult to relate in a linear fashion due to the layers of interests and the contemporaneous nature of its elements. There were issues relating to the social context of racism and violence in Australian cities towards international students over the period. There was also a political context, where the leaders of several countries were concerned as to the safety and welfare of their students, and the Australian politicians were anxious regarding the possible financial implications for the higher education sector if fewer international students attended Australian universities. At the time, there was also an ongoing conflict between the academic ideals of those who work within the education system and the stark realities of the financial requirements to keep that educational system buoyant – an old but common story (Maton, 2006). The multiple and often blurring roles I personally have undertaken during the period of the story as instructional designer, lecturer, representative of Newgarth University and researcher tend to add to the non-linear construction of the narrative.

Thus, as a necessity, the narration follows a course of action that I took personally as the researcher. I admit to being a naive and pragmatic teacher who sought simply to improve the educational experiences of a group of international students, whom I felt were experiencing unjust treatment within a somewhat unusual educational setting. It is unavoidable that I will view this narration through the lens of both an educator and of a human rights lawyer. As such it is unlikely that a similar situation would arise again where the context would create such a social “petri dish”, capable of incubating the overlapping conflicting interests that were present in the study.

The study contributes to the discourse of blended learning and education involving international students in Australia. The study is of particular interest to online course developers, academics,

educationists, and practitioners in the fields of business law, and those practitioners who are developing higher education through moderation assessment models, utilising an arrangement in which a university could choose to deliver programs in conjunction with non-university partners. The study may be of particular interest to those institutions developing the "flipped classroom" format. (Educause, 2012)

## 1.2 Structure of the Thesis

This section of Chapter 1 introduces the structure of the thesis and explains the significance of the research. The background context, overall aim, and objectives of this thesis are discussed.

The chapters of the thesis are as follows:

Chapter 1 – *10 Days in April 2009: that could have happened this way.*
Introduction: The Nature and Significance of the Research

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Chapter 4 – Reporting the Research: Phase 1 –Identifying the Historical Context of the Issue

Chapter 5 – Reporting the Research: Phase 2 – The Online Test and the Identification of the Issue

Chapter 6 – Reporting the Research: Phase 3 – The Qualitative Study

Chapter 7 – Analysis and Interpretation

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

Chapter 2 provides a summary of the main academic literature that has been written on the development of online learning, its inception, application, and discourse. It examines the rapid development of online education, its application to higher education, and the reasons for its uptake in the university sector. The literature review examines Bourdieu's interpretation of the theory of fields (Bourdieu, 1983). The literature review explains this socioeconomic theory and how it may be used as an overlay, like a grid, to map out the underlying theoretical foundation for the thesis. The literature review examines how the application of the theoretical tools derived from the works of Bourdieu may have been used to predict the actions of the student cohort at the centre of this study.

Chapter 3 consists of an examination of the methodological issues involved in the research and a description of the research methods used for the data collection. It is in itself a part of the journey taken in this research. The chapter tells how, in a narrative, that I was unsure of where to start the study, or indeed, whether I could incorporate the work I had done previously. I tell how I examined the various theories, paradigms and perspectives to arrive at a very pragmatic approach. This approach was simply what I had done previously but had now academically justified as part of the study.

In Chapter 4, I set the contextual location of the study both geographically and in terms of the socio-political, cultural and economic influences, which were at play upon the subjects of the study during the period in question. The first part of the chapter briefly describes the business plan of Newgarth University together with the rationale for that plan. The contextual description offered in this chapter highlights a conflict between education for betterment via academic advancement and

education for betterment via legislative requirement. In short, it was the conflict of gaining a degree for acquisition of personal knowledge or gaining a degree to meet immigration legislative requirements. The second part of this chapter discusses events of civil and cultural unrest experienced by many international students at the time. The events were well publicised, and this section draws from the media reports of the period.

Chapter 5 examines Phase 2 of the research – the survey, which was undertaken in partner institutions. This chapter discusses the survey in depth and its delivery method. The survey was based on the Web Based Learning Environment Instrument (WEBLEI) (Chang & Fisher, 2006). The participants in the survey were students who had been undertaking a commercial law subject at several partner institutions of Newgarth University. The students were from two different classes from two separate teaching periods in 2009. The two different groups were both given an online assessment task; however, the second group's task differed significantly in how it was construed and accessed by students.

In Chapter 6, Phase 3 – the qualitative study is discussed. For this phase of the research, data collection was undertaken in teaching periods two and three in 2009. The interviewees included managers from partner institutions, four individual students, and focus groups from three other partner institutions. The aim of the student focus group interviews was to collect qualitative answers from students as to why they suspected students answered the survey the way they did.

In Chapter 7, the analysis of the interviews, focus groups, meeting and the survey direct the reader away from the original foreshadowing questions and, instead, alert the reader to the possibility that the initial problem was one of financial control of the students. However, underpinning this financial manipulation is a complex social structure created by the students to recreate social hierarchy and support systems, which were sadly not provided for in the fledgling Australian education systems designed around partner institutions.

When a model of this internal student social structure is overlaid on a model of Bourdieu's fields structure, startling similarities can be determined. It is these similarities which created the simple theory that any given group of students will, by necessity, create allegiance groups required to support their desired outcomes. Where no guidance is given to these allegiance groups, they will be captured by dominant hegemonies. Communal resistance is a term commonly associated with neighbourhoods who resist change or activities that upset the status quo of the community. In the context of this study it is used to demonstrate how the communities of students resisted change to their status quo

A separate auto- ethnographical analysis has been added to provide an analysis of the story itself.

Chapter Eight, the concluding chapter, will bring together the key findings of the study and their implications for educationalists looking to implement electronic learning management systems in education courses. This chapter will offer suggestion as to why a cohort of students would fail to submit an online assessment as well as a possible method for preventing the occurrence happening again. This chapter will also examine possibilities for future research and suggest developments that may be able to improve the use of electronic learning management systems in Australian tertiary education.

## 1.3 Visual Guide to the Timeline of this Thesis

The narrative of how my initial practice-based enquiries developed into a PhD research journey is layered with the embedded social context of a very turbulent period for international student education in Australia. Harris (2015) noted in the journeys studied in her work that although the

journeys conducted by the participants were chronologically sequential, the data derived from them was nonlinear. Harris relied on McKercher (1999), who suggest that those who use modelling in relation to journeys do not appreciate the nonlinear manner in which journeys operate. McKercher (1999) argues that it is this nonlinearity "that makes it extremely difficult to show cause and effect between actions" (McKercher, 1999, p. 427). Such was the experience I encountered when attempting to position my narrative within the very complex political and social upheaval of the time. Both Harris and McKercher were writing in relation to journeys in tourism, though this conflict between chronological sequacity and nonlinearity is particularly pertinent to this research journey. To help guide the reader through the episodic nature of this journey, I have provided a diagrammatic time line of my engagement with the emerging nature of the research from 2007 to 2011 (see Figure 1). This diagram appears, with different annotations, in each of the following chapters in order to assist readers to understand the sequence of the research. I have added a legend to the diagram in Figure 2 to help identify the layers of social interest that were occurring contemporaneously with changes that were being made internally by Newgarth University to teaching structures, all of which affected the engagement of international students at different campuses with their course of study.

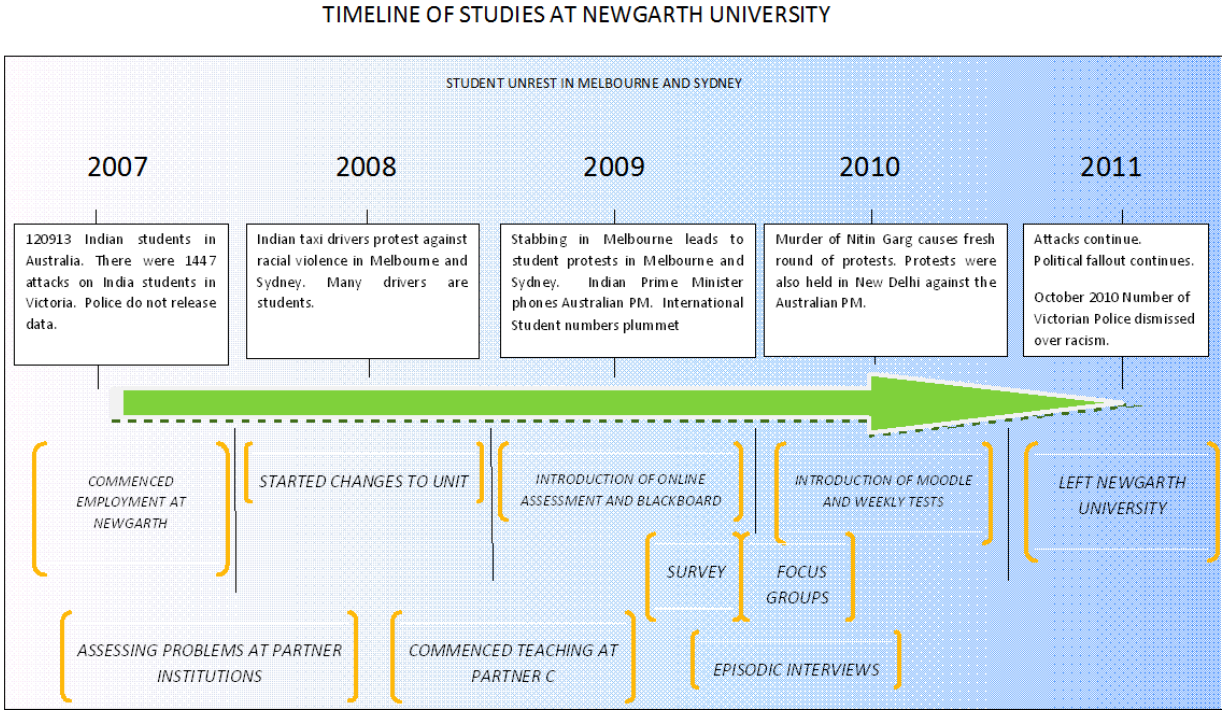



*Figure 1*. Timeline of the research.

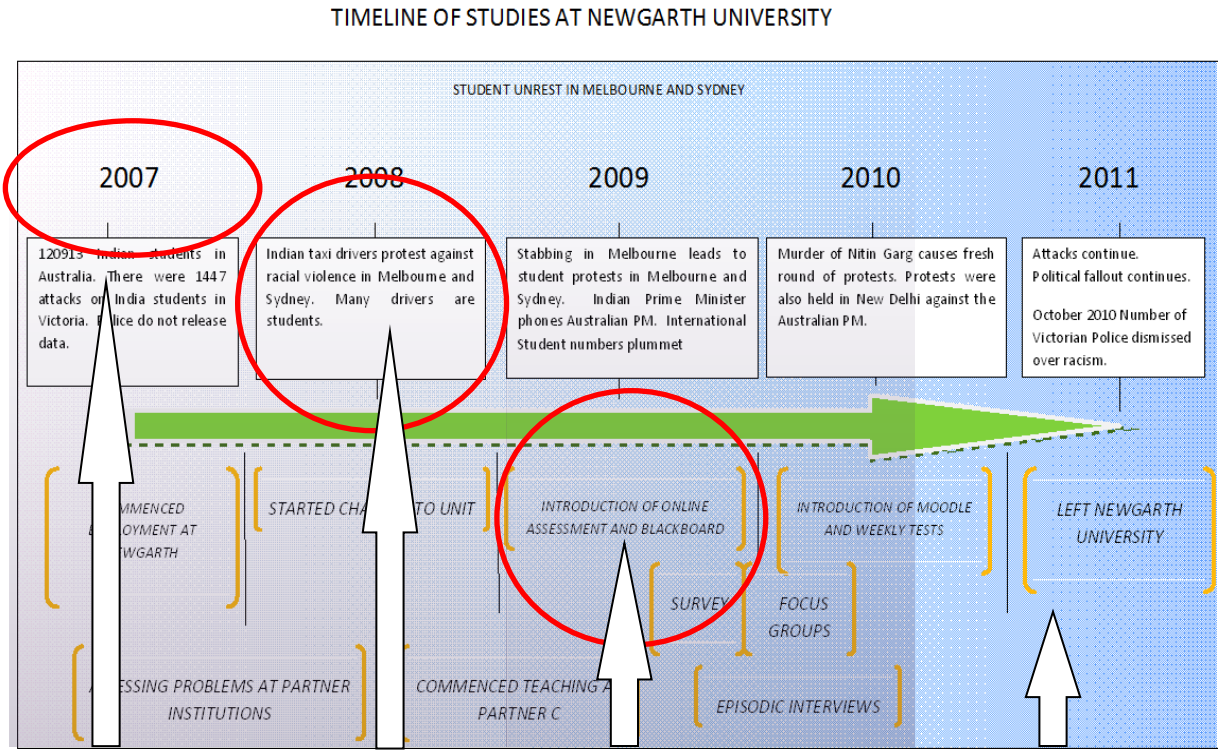



*Figure 2.* Legend for the diagrammatic representation of the timeline of studies at Newgarth University.

Legend:

- The years noted across the top of the diagram correspond to the years of my teaching at Newgarth University.
- The white text boxes display some of the social context of the period.
- The text in the parenthesis shows the various stages of my involvement at Newgarth University.
- The non-shaded area displays the period that this chapter relates to.

## 1.4 The Emergence of the Research Questions

In this section, I will attempt to guide the reader through a maze of issues and sub-issues associated with formulating the research aims, objectives and questions.

The socio-political period 2007–2011 in Australia was volatile. There was a great deal of unrest and dissatisfaction among international students, many of whom felt they were being racially vilified within Australia. Several factors contributed to this unrest and dissatisfaction, including immigration policies, which were vague and constantly in a state of flux, the home lives of the students and the lack of pastoral support for international students when they arrived in Australia, and the seemingly unfair treatment from some Australian institutions (see para 4.7 the 2009 Melbourne student protests). In the course of attempting to gain understanding of these factors, I recognised the

significant impact of some issues only after retrospective reflection. As in any good "whodunit" detective novel, a great deal of deduction was required for me to work through the problems encountered. As usual, the villain of the piece is not always identifiable until the end and is often not who was the obvious suspect. Along the way, I made many misinterpretations. I encountered misdirection and resistance from some of the actors, pursued inevitable red herrings, and had to deal with political interventions. There were clashes of cultures, clashes of ideals and chasms between the expected outcomes of those involved. Moreover, yes, there was unfortunately a murder. However, as is often the case, the climax of unrest that was highlighted by the death of this poor young man suddenly brought a renewed resolve to cooperate towards ending violence and discrimination against international students in Australia.

Nevertheless, throughout this period of unrest, which coincided with my research, I found the students at the centre of this study to be some of the most wonderful and delightful students I had encountered. To see them work so hard only to fail in so many cases was soul-destroying. My personal feeling was that these students deserved much better support from the institutions than had been offered to them. These students, in many cases, had borrowed huge amounts of funds to engage in an expensive educational product that was far from perfect. If Australians as consumers spent an equal amount of money on an Australian-made product – for example, Holden cars, and faults arose with those cars in the same monotonous regularity that problems arose with these educational products that were being provided to international students, there would have been rioting in the streets. Actually, that is exactly what the students finally did. In 2009, these same students protested in the streets to gain national and international recognition for their problems and to force action in order to achieve a resolution.

In the early period of my work, from 2007 to 2009, I, too, was simply attempting to make the lot of these students better. For two years I talked with students, talked with staff, evaluated programs, researched, made changes, re-evaluated and made further changes to the units I was responsible for. The sole purpose of this work was to achieve better academic results for the students. I was determined that I would not "dumb-down" the academic level of the units. In working so closely with the students, I strongly felt that there was no need to reduce academic levels. They were, in the main, bright, intelligent, articulate people who were simply out of their own environment. They were like the proverbial fish out of water. I know now I was incredibly naïve. That is not an easy admission for a 60-something-year-old man of the world, ex-barrister to make. I ran head-on into resistance I did not see coming.

Foolishly, I had thought I was wanted in my position at the university to help resolve problems for the students. In fact, it appeared that the premise of my position was to enforce the notion held by some in the Business School at Newgarth University (at that time) that international students were not intelligent enough to obtain Australian degrees. Resistance to this notion required a great deal of personal stamina. That is not to say that my initial work on behalf of the students was not without academic foundations. Indeed, I conducted a great deal of practitioner research on what I considered to be the problem of how to increase pass rates. The possibility that the problem may have been symptomatic of a deeper systemic issue was not on my radar at that early stage. Even if it had been, it is unlikely that those resultant remedial actions I took in the early stages would have been any different.

At the start of the 2009 teaching period, I was confident that I had put in place sufficient remedial actions to enable the students at Newgarth University's partner institutions to perform on a par with the international and domestic students at Newgarth's home campus. For more administrative reasons than pedagogical, an online assessment task was introduced to the students as part of the assessment regime for the commercial law unit. As mentioned previously, however, an almost entire

cohort of students failed to submit this assessment. I asked myself the following questions that became the objectives of the research:

1. What went wrong? This question required an examination of the historical context of the event.

2. How can we understand what happened here? Having determined what actually occurred, is it possible to analyse the event to create an understanding of the social political and cultural interplays

3. What does this mean for me personally? In true autoethnographical style, am I able to analyse the event from the data of my own emotional and narrative journey?

To discover what went wrong, I designed a survey to give to the class involved. The survey required an application to the Human Research and Ethics Committee (which is detailed in Chapter 3) and approval from the Head of the Business School. I was advised by the Head to turn this research into a PhD study.

To understand what happened, I tried to apply various academic theories. Unfortunately, without great success. Eventually I settled on the research of Pierre Bourdieu and his application of habitus.

To analyse what occurred to me in this journey is the hardest of all the questions. As a lawyer I was trained, and had trained myself, to think only of the process. The process relates only to objective criteria that can be weighed and judged against measured evidence. In practice as a barrister one has to defend many objectionable people who are alleged to have committed unspeakable crimes. It is not the barrister's role to judge these people – that is the judge's job. The barrister as an officer of the court protects the legal process and ensure that every person, no matter their place in society, has the same access to the legal rights that protect them, under the laws of the jurisdiction. I am therefore a firm believer in separating the people from the problem (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1982). Take the personalities out of the process and this will allow the process to work. On this teaching and research journey, in very stark contrast to my training, I have to deal with my very conflicting emotional reactions to injustice, racial prejudice, personal attacks and frustration. To say nothing of being made to feel that I was a spy in a war zone and should be treated as a collaborator. In many cases it has occurred that I was personally treated as a traitor to the cause, and that stigma still remains. I had to deal with my students - and friends - being physically and mentally abused, persecuted, usually in the name of the almighty dollar. The most depressing emotion of all is futility; in that despite the fights, the injuries, the human toll, the stress, the battles won… the phoney war drags on… and for what end?

Placing the emotional turmoil aside and returning to the start of the research process, as the students were not a homogeneous group, I was interested in whether there was some common trait in their background which would create the resistance I had experienced. I had originally considered:

> *that the students' habitus would affect their learning style inventories in relation to electronic learning management systems.*

This proved to be a dead end as, during the research journey, I found it was established habitus that creates a preference for a learning style; however, an appropriate learning style will be adopted by a student as the context requires. I pursued a new line of inquiry:

> *Does a learning style affect a student's perception of electronic learning management systems?*

The answer to this question was discovered to be, yes. An individual student's learning style does affect their perception of electronic learning management systems, but not their performance using them. I felt I was no closer to discovering the root cause of the resistance to the test. It was when reassessing the data collected to date, I noticed that although I was focusing on the individual student, during the course of this research journey, it became evident that the participant did not relate information in terms of the individual, but in terms of the collective and in terms of communities. If, then, the research was focused to

> *Does habitus affect a cohort of students' perception of electronic learning management systems?*

the answer becomes a resounding yes, and prompts us to identify the factors required to meet the research objective of *How can we understand what happened here?*

According to the application of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields, the institution may instigate symbolic violence against its participants in order to ensure that its hegemony is adhered to. Symbolic violence may manifest itself in various forms, including but not limited to, application of lower grades, high failure rates, and over enforcement of plagiarism. The implementation of symbolic violence will invite resistance. Resistance to symbolic violence will be more effective if it is communal and systematic. It is the students' habitus that will dictate the form of this communal resistance. Communal resistance may manifest itself in more physical terms such as protests and political activism. Such protests may be small – for example, collectively refusing to undertake an assessment – or large such as a march to block a main street of one of Australia's largest cities and make political appeals to the international high commissions of other countries to intervene.

This thesis, by examining a small (almost insignificant) incident which occurred in 2009, adds to the collective knowledge of academics in this area by providing one possible theory as to why that incident occurred. The analysis of this event offers a barometer by which to examine similar incidents in light of Bourdieusian acts of symbolic violence. It is suggested that such recognition can be used to prevent the escalation of incidents or to design units of study which acknowledge the theory of fields when selecting their pedagogical basis.

## 1.5 The Research Approach

To return to the metaphor of the "whodunit" novel, the detective, possibly an amateur sleuth, is confronted with an undeniable event, usually a murder. The victim is dead. The sleuth's task is then to retrace events that led to the climactic situation, detect who had means, motive and opportunity, and deduce from the evidence who, from a collection of dubious suspects, was the true antagonist. This study, too, is about the occurrence of a single event. A small event that occurred at the beginning of April 2009. It was the resisted by a group of students. The task required was to trace back to the events that had led up to the students' actions and from this evidence deduce who or what had caused this situation.

Much of the tracing back had to be conducted through reviewing my own story – recalling events that I had personally seen and experienced. As a barrister, I would have called this evidence-in-chief; the best evidence is the testimony of the eyewitness. However, in an academic field, the eyewitness holds little credibility unless that person's story or narrative is corroborated. Corroboration is supporting evidence that goes to the credibility of one's claims, either by other academics discovering similar findings, or, in the case of a narrative, by being able to fix the claims in time and place by "triangulation" (Flick, 2007). The narrative can then be triangulated by producing documents

such as media reports, court cases, or governmental reports that support the timeline of events and one's perspective of these events. Wall (2008 ) sees the converse of corroboration. A narrative is not just a story that needs hard evidence; it is also a method of connecting academic concepts with real-life experiences. Thus, by relating a narrative, it is possible to see how academic concepts work in the field. In this study, I feel that both perspectives have been canvassed. The narrative provides the evidence-in-chief upon which corroboration hangs but also displays retrospectively how a philosophical theory plays out in the normal, non-academic world.

In order to use a narrative, it is usual to start at the beginning. Hermanns (1995, p. 183) explains that a narrative is characterised, in the context of collecting social data, as follows:

> First the initial situation is outlined ("how everything started") and then the events relevant to the narrative are selected from the whole host of experiences and presented as a coherent progression of events ("how things developed") until presenting the situation at the end of the development ("what became"). (Hermanns, 1995, p. 183)

I researched the literature on student resistance to online education (which is reviewed in the next chapter) and discovered the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu developed a theory of fields, where he followed in the Aristotle tradition of habitus to explain the behaviour of groups he observed. (This is explained briefly below.) Were, then, the students who were faced with a new experience, of which they were unsure, simply resorting to the social normalities of their habitus? One difficulty here is that this was not a homogeneous group from one area in one country. A second difficulty was that the international students at the Newgarth home campus, and indeed one of the partner institutions, seemed to have behaved entirely differently to those at the other partner institutions. I also discovered that there was a recognised phenomenon that approximately 25 per cent of students in a given cohort are most likely to resist blended learning (Akkoyunlu & Yilmaz-Soylu, 2008). Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz-Soylu's (2008) study may have helped provide an academic theory to explain the resistance from the students at the partner institutions, but not why almost an entire cohort of students at the partner institutions would fail. Based on the only substantial evidence I had been provided with – that of a number of student conversations – I could only assume that the students were not comfortable with online assessment, and that there was something in these students' educational background that caused them to resist blended learning. It seemed likely that when faced with a situation they found uncomfortable, the international students at the partner institutions would respond by habit in ways that were consistent and acceptable in their home culture. This then became my starting point.

## 1.6 Terms and Definitions

*Legal education*
In this context relates not only to the pursuit of an LLB (Bachelor of Laws) or an LLM (Master of Law) but to such units as consumer law, business law, corporations' law, taxation law, international business law, competition law, and an introduction to Australian law as required by various other degrees such as Bachelor of Accounting, Bachelor of Commerce and Master of Professional Accounting. For the purpose of this study, I have collectively used these terms and created a generic commercial law unit.

*Teaching period*
As will become evident later in the study, there were three teaching periods at Newgarth University.

1. March to July, inclusive

2. August to November, inclusive

3. November to March, inclusive.

There may be several semesters, which are run within these teaching periods, that are dependent upon the operations of the relevant partner institutions.

*Blended learning*

Electronic componentry and resources are increasingly being introduced into education. This is seen at the earliest stages of physiological development as a result of the recent introduction of the Learning Potential app. The Hon Christopher Pyne MP stated that "The Learning Potential app offers inspiring ways for parents to become more engaged in their children's learning at any age – from high chair to high school" (Department Of Education And Training, 2015). At the highest educational levels, complete electronic learning management systems (LMS), such as Blackboard and Moodle, are increasingly being used.

Many electronic devices, such as appliance remote controls, are now often delivered to the public, complete with internalised or internet-based tutorials to explain to the purchaser how to use them (logitech.com, 2010). The publishers of most commercial law textbooks in Australia now also have electronic and/or internet interfaces, which come in the form of a licence when a book, either in hard copy or electronically, is purchased. Such electronic resources are introduced and utilised by teachers and students in a variety of education modes. They range from fully online, real-time delivery of courses to courses that simply use electronic presentations such as PowerPoint slides to supplement traditional teaching methods. The traditional face-to-face mode may successfully be augmented by using electronic resources that can be made available to students via an LMS. Rather than a television broadcast where one station transmits to multiple receivers, these LMS platforms have the capability of providing multi-station to multi-station communications so that participants in a course can communicate with each other independently of the lecturer or host. By using these platforms, it is possible to have hundreds of independent private video communications occurring simultaneously between participants in a course.

One application where this facility has become popular is in the operation of MOOC's (massive open online courses) (MOOC List, 2017). An LMS has the ability to allow study and tutorial groups to operate in different time zones independent of the host. It may also be used in such a manner that an entire program of study is pre-programmed and will operate sequentially as an individual participant progresses through the course by triggering the release of further material (contingent release) once the participant successfully negotiates hurdles that are preset within the course material. By using this method, hundreds of individual students can negotiate through the materials, assessments and hurdles of a course at their own pace, contacting the lecturer or tutor only when the need arises or at a predetermined time. It is this kind of blended learning (an amalgamation of online and face-to-face delivery and assessment) that has been advocated by Battye and Carter (2009) and which is considered to be the most promising pedagogical approach for utilising an LMS (Battye & Carter, 2009; Chang & Fisher, 2006; Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004) The majority of researchers in this field suggest that an LMS can successfully integrate face-to-face teaching and "hard copy materials" with an online environment that includes data, presentations and interactive activities which maintain student engagement with a given topic.

The general view of these researchers appears to be that an LMS can become an extension of the lecturer in the delivery of courses. *Blended learning* or *hybrid learning* are the most common and accepted terms used to describe education programs that integrate the traditional modes of face-to-

face delivery with some level of augmented computer-based learning activities. Blended learning uses computer and internet activities as enhancements to the learning environment created by the teacher/lecturer. This is distinguished from *online learning* which is defined as an alternative to face-to-face learning (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009).

However, even the terms *online learning* or *blended learning* are a little vague when applied to synchronous delivery in which face-to-face and online lectures are taught at the same time by broadcasting the live lecture online. In synchronous teaching, the lecture is delivered face-to-face to the external participants via a different medium. Almost every Australian sports fan would understand this concept of a live broadcast, and now most have the ability to join such broadcasts via Twitter feeds, where the viewers make real-time comments on screen.

An amazing demonstration of blended learning was delivered by the Environmental Studies Department at Charles Darwin University, Australia. The video-conferencing platform Collaborate was utilised to take students on a virtual live field trip to the Northern Territory's costal mangrove areas. These mangrove habitats are an extremely delicate micro–environment, where a class tramping through them would cause untold damage, not to mention the very real physical dangers that the students would be exposed to by such an exercise as well. Blended learning in this example enabled a non-destructive examination of a very fragile and environmentally threatened ecosystem.

Garrison and Vaughan (2008) describe blended learning as a "the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 5) The important aspect of this description is the word "fusion." The face-to-face and online components of the course, module, or unit are integrated to the point where neither face-to-face nor online teaching is capable of teaching the participants across the entire spectrum of the topic by itself. Both methods of teaching are required to make sense of the materials. For example, an instructional video may be provided together with written commentary for teaching a nursing procedure. The procedure can be practised by students in a face-to-face laboratory setting using remotely controlled "patient mannequins" (laerdal.com, 2015). The mannequins create a log of the procedure, which is then examined online in an interactive assessment exercise. The "patients" can be given the symptoms of various disorders, which require the participants to undertake various diagnostic strategies (laerdal.com, 2015). The video enables the students to work through the material at their own speed; the class work provides the opportunity for supervision from an instructor. The assessment utilising the patient mannequins provides variable diagnostic situations, which would be difficult to reproduce in written or other practical formats, even in a live hospital setting.

However, students have become adept in managing what information is important and what is a side salad (Catalyst, 2012). Skelton (2009), in his research at a New Zealand teaching institution, noted that students were less likely to engage with online learning material if they considered that the material was an "add-on" and not central to the learning outcomes of the unit. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) note that it is important to ensure that any course material given to the students guides them through the process of self-learning. The purpose of the material is to shape the way in which the students take responsibility for their own learning. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) suggest that metacognitive awareness is the key to students learning to monitor and manage their own learning:

> Metacognition is the regulation of cognition, which includes self-appraisal (assessing what needs to be done) and self-management (successfully carrying out the learning task). Engaging in higher order learning experience requires that students have some metacognitive understanding of the inquiry process if students are to learn how to learn. (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 26)

Garrison and Vaughan (2008) regard any academic course materials as part of the "teaching presence", one element of a triangle of presences, which creates a community of inquiry and includes the social and cognitive presences of a community. The relationship of this trinity of presences is represented in the diagram in Figure 3.

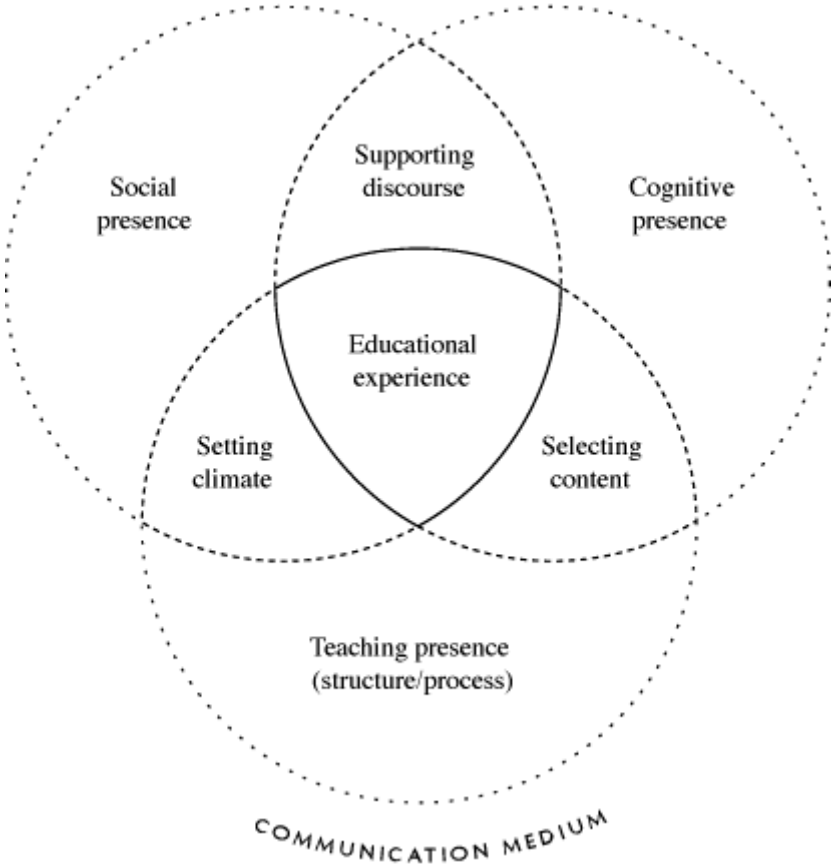



*Figure 3*. Community of inquiry framework. From *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines* (p. 18, by D. R. Garrison and N. D. Vaughan, 2008, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.) Copyright 2008 by John Wiley & Sons Inc. Reprinted with permission.

"Teaching presence establishes the curriculum, approaches, and methods; it also moderates guides and focuses discourse and tasks" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 24). Battye and Carter (2009) were also at great pains to point out that content alone is not sufficient. The instructor must be skilled in using the materials in an online environment, which encompasses the social and cognitive presences.

From the description provided by Garrison and Vaughan (2008), it appears that blended learning requires more than simply placing electronic files on an electronic medium. It is a system of face-to-face teaching that is integrated with interactive electronic components and is supported by carefully constructed and scaffolded communities of practice/inquiry, in which students take responsibility for their own learning in a peer-supported environment.

The delivery method used by the Newgarth University partner institutions was not considered by the academic community to be blended learning (Battye & Carter, 2009; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Means et al., 2009). At the partner institutions, the use of electronic aids for teaching consisted mainly of replacing the old traditional chalk blackboards or whiteboards with a projector for PowerPoint presentations. The written materials, such as the study guide, unit description, and the information that the students needed to participate in the units, were available on the Newgarth University LMS. However, following a presentation I gave to the Business School staff who were responsible for implementing the learning and teaching procedures and policies of the school

(Learning and Teaching Committee), it was accepted that the students at partner institutions were not accessing this material.

*Partner institutions*

The term is used frequently in this thesis. I have attempted to explain the concept in depth in Chapter 3, though this introductory chapter is the best place to preliminarily introduce these institutions. The term relates to an educational business model, which strongly resembles a contractual franchise structure. In this relationship the concept is that, no matter where a Newgarth University course is taught, it will remain the same, and the academic difficulty level with remain constant.

To explain this concept, I have chosen the McDonald's Family Restaurants franchise, one of the most best-known franchise business ownerships operating today. One feature of the McDonald's chain is that no matter where you go in the world, the choice of food on offer is almost identical to any other McDonald's. Most McDonald's restaurants are privately owned franchises. A condition of operating such a franchise is that all food sold must be sourced from McDonald's or their priority providers. (McDonald's in Reykjavik, Iceland, is an exception to this rule). This condition ensures a constant income stream for the McDonald's company and, more importantly, guarantees consistency of the products being sold under the McDonald's name.

As the model is a business structure, the legal implications need to be given a cursory examination. The model is not a partnership in Australian legal terms despite the name. The legal definition of a partnership is "…the relation which subsists between persons carrying on a business in common with a view of profit" (*Partnership Act 1958* (Vic), s. 5(1)) (Parliament, 1958). Newgarth and its partner institutions were not carrying on a business in common. The entities were separate and never combined. There was no franchise agreement in the contractual agreement between Newgarth and the partner institutions (reference to the partner providers' contact has been withheld for privacy reasons). This leaves the option of a service agreement whereby an external party is contracted to deliver outsourced services. Newgarth University contracted with partner institutions who operated trans-state; therefore prior to January 2011 and for the period covered in this study, the legislation relating to this contractual arrangement was the *Trade Practices Act 1974* (Cth) (Australian Federal Parliament, 1974).

Newgarth University had a product in that it had a suite of degrees that it could confer; however, it was not in a strong position to attract international students because of its regional location and relatively poor facilities. Therefore, Newgarth University had widened the delivery of its degree courses to international students by outsourcing the course delivery via contractual arrangements with partner institutions. The courses could be described as "courses in a box", where everything that the teacher required to teach a course was provided in one place. In principle, the so-called box could be unpacked and taught in any location as an exact copy of the course as delivered at Newgarth University. The assessment tasks for this course are set by Newgarth University. The assignments are marked by the staff of the partner institutions. The marking of assignments is moderated by Newgarth University staff checking a random sample of the students' work. This form of moderation is not new; it was loosely based on an Indian model, where university graduate schools had external or affiliated colleges offering their undergraduate degrees. According to the World Bank (2007):

> Local quality inspection of affiliated colleges are carried out by the affiliating university to ensure provision of adequate academic infrastructure and satisfactory teaching–learning processes. Analysis of examination performance of students is also used by universities to

assess the quality of educational offerings of individual colleges. (World Bank, 2007, p. 7, Para1.7)

University moderation models are not uncommon and have gained popularity in Australian universities over the past 15 years. In the Newgarth University model, all the students are enrolled as Newgarth University students. Teaching, physical resources and welfare of the students are outsourced to private educational providers – the partner institutions. It is these institutions which serve as secondary campuses for the parent university, and where the face-to-face teaching of international students takes place. In a diagrammatic form, Newgarth University provides the course in a box for various degrees. Newgarth University also provides the necessary legal registration to provide legally recognised degrees (see Figure 4).

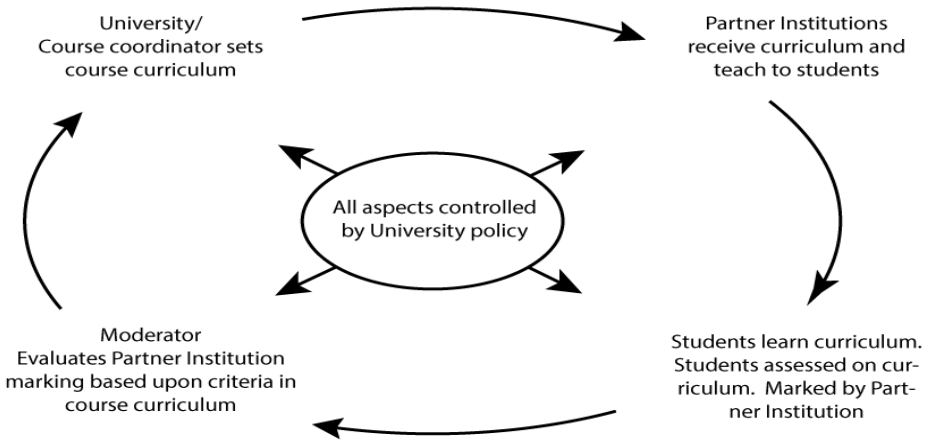



*Figure 4.* Theoretical moderation systems at Newgarth University

In this model, the moderators are separate from the partner institutions and may even be separate from Newgarth University. It was not uncommon for Newgarth University to contract independent moderators when there were staff shortages or when independent benchmarking was required. The teachers at partner institutions teach according to Newgarth University's curriculum framework. The students are assessed by staff of the partner institutions. The onus is on the Newgarth University employee or moderator to maintain academic standards.

The reality of the relationship between Newgarth University and the partner institutions was somewhat different to the model. In the true relationship, the progression appeared to be linear not circular. I have attempted to display this in Figure 5. The coordination and moderation are retained by Newgarth University at its home campus. Thus, the onus is on Newgarth University, not the partner institutions, to ensure equivalence in teaching standards. However, little feedback has been given to the course coordinators to enable them to assess the effectiveness of their courses. The moderation samples were not generated randomly and gave an incorrect picture of student performance. As will be seen later in the study, passes were awarded to students who had not reached the required academic standards, and in some cases students who did perform well were scaled back. All this made it almost impossible to moderate the effectiveness of the teaching from assessment performances alone.

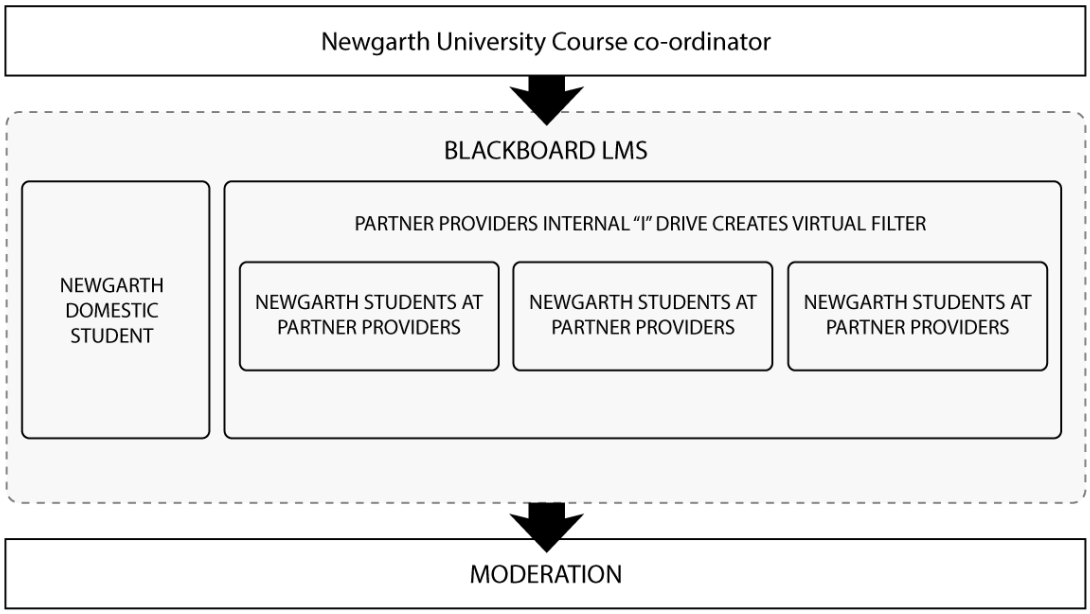



*Figure 5.* Actual moderation system where the I - drive creates virtual filter.

*Learning management system (LMS)*

A term that is also used extensively in this study. Learning management systems relate to an electronic program that facilitates the delivery of online material and resources to students. An LMS also has an important role to play in administration, reporting, documenting, and tracking of a student's performance. The most common LMS is Blackboard, which is owned and operated by Blackboard Inc. The second is Moodle, which is a *freeware* – it is free on the internet. While a freeware may sound positively tantalising and everyone should run out and get one, it should be pointed out that the Moodle freeware is a basic program, and to achieve anything worthwhile, it will need a dedicated team of backroom IT gurus to design anything workable.

So, the balancing act begins: whether to pay for a tried and true dedicated LMS with untold back-up and research and development or go with a free version and develop your own R and D division with the hope that it will work. Either way, there will not be much change from A$1 million a year. My personal preference is for Blackboard. I have worked with Blackboard and its predecessors for over 20 years. It has been developed in accordance with academic requirements and has a good system of academic developers who test and report to Blackboard. Blackboard also has a host of reporting facilities built in, which can generate reports on a variety of statistics on the performance of all users or participants. As will be seen in the following chapters, these reports, complex and comprehensive as they are, need to be contextualised within the environments where they are applied. Blackboard was the LMS that was used by Newgarth University until the first Teaching Period 2010 (March 2010).

A further difficulty with the Newgarth University model was the contractual requirement that the partner institutions provide an internal electronic resource for the students. The partners achieved this by providing an intranet on an accessible drive (or partition) on their institution's computer network. These intranets were simply resource drives like a hard drive on a computer. They are repositories for files and are not interactive like the learning management systems. These drives also contain firewalls to prevent misuse and abuse.

The intranets are the student community's private space. They are designed to provide students with access to a partner institution's rules and regulations, their course materials and other community resources such as job searches and an accommodation noticeboard. It was my experience, as

detailed in Chapter 4, that lecturers at the partner institutions often supplemented the Newgarth University-provided course materials with materials of their own and recommended these to the students. These materials may be as simple as case studies or as complex as a full PowerPoint presentation on an aid to presenting legal opinions. The Newgarth University course coordinators have no control over the content that is placed on these resources by partner institution staff. It was my understanding that the intranets were never intended to replace Newgarth University's LMS. Students studying at partner institutions had access to the Newgarth University LMS via the internet and used Newgarth University external access login passwords; however, to achieve this access they had to leave or go outside the partner institutions' internal services. There was no internal access from the intranet to the internet, and students were provided with a small metered allowance of internet usage at the partner institutions.

In a somewhat conflicting method, the Business School at Newgarth University utilised, from Teaching Period 1 2009, the Blackboard LMS as the vehicle for delivering blended learning. This move tended to reshape the course-in-a-box method of teaching to incorporate the centralisation of teaching material. The introduction (rollout) of blended learning to the partner institutions encountered an unforeseen difficulty. While this difficulty was only discovered retrospectively, I feel that it is important to set the scene, so to speak, and explain this difficulty at the introduction stage.

The intranets at the partner institutions were on a partition of the internal computer network called the I - drive. These intranets were very useful and used quite efficiently by the partner institutions. The students found them easy to use and helpful. There was even a program on the I - drive that would enable tutors in tutorials to mark attendance so as the partner institution could ensure compliance with immigration reporting requirements. This was a manual system (unlike the automatic data gathering aspects of Blackboard) but effective if somewhat slow. In a standard traditional face-to-face teaching environment, the I - drive did a good job. There was little need for the students to venture outside of the I - drive for matters relating to their study.

When blended learning was introduced, Blackboard was the medium that the Newgarth University course co-ordinators were required to use, to disseminate materials and create online assessments. The students and staff at partner institutions were now required to work outside of the I - drive by accessing and using Blackboard. The difficulty that occurred was that the I - drive was so popular that neither the teaching staff nor students at the partner institutions saw a need to change. In Figure 5, the diagrammatic form of the situation shows that the I - drive became a virtual filter, or firewall, that in effect blocked the use of Blackboard at partner institutions.

When students studying at partner institutions did access the Blackboard LMS, they complained that the file sizes and lack of security verification licences at Newgarth University tended to prevent the Newgarth University website being used by the partner networks. The lack of access to the Blackboard LMS was often compounded by individual students lacking access to a home computer and internet.

## 1.7 Conclusion

This thesis is a case study of an incident that occurred in April 2009. A cohort of international students undertaking a commercial law unit at an Australian educational institution failed to submit a small but critical assessment task. It is a story of a group of people who, for many of them, came to Australia in search of a different life. In order to achieve their goal, they were required to undertake and pass certain criteria as set out in the immigration requirements. What they encountered was a mismatch of ideals, misinterpretations, misunderstandings, business ventures and social resistance.

I took on the task, as best I could, to correct the injustice I saw these people being subjected to. I felt I had achieved great strides when, in a move uncontemplated by me, almost the entire cohort en masse declined to undertake an online assessment task set for them. This thesis is an examination of the possible reasons these students had for declining to undertake the assessment task. It is an autoethnographic examination of my personal trials and tribulations. What had I done to cause this? I investigated whether there were cultural factors that contributed to their decision. Was this a social issue, or a breakdown in pedagogy? Was there something I could have done to predict the students' actions and so prevent it happening?

With these questions in mind, this introduction has prepared the reader for the information to be unveiled in the ensuing chapters. I first examine the literature relating to the case study. Following that, I explore a methodology that could be the basis for a study of this kind. I then set the social and geographical context for the next four years as best as I can without infringing on the personal privacy of the stakeholders. I explain the actual research that was conducted and finally attempt to interpret the results by overlaying a theoretical viewpoint to provide a possible explanation for them. Finally, a small postscript describes where my research journey has taken me.

# *Chapter 2*

# *Literature Review*

## 2.1 Introduction

This literature review is divided into four distinct sections. They are as follows:

- History and context of ICT, blended learning, and online learning
- How students perceive online learning
- The effect of culture on learning styles
- Fields, habitus, cultural capital and symbolic violence.

This structure reflects the different stages that this project metamorphosed through from the chrysalis of a pragmatic problem to the emerging of a fully formed concept by overlaying of an established philosophical theory on data collected relating to that problem. There still appears to be very little written on the topic of international students in Australia studying online or using blended learning. The stark reality is that this practice is strongly discouraged by both the Australian Federal Government in legislation and by the educational providers. The government wants students physically in classrooms, spending money in shops, on accommodation, creating jobs and generating revenue (also known colloquially as the warm-body syndrome or BOS (bums on seats)).

For the government, bringing overseas cash into Australia is a windfall (Burton-Bradly, 2018). Thus, there is a strong deterrent to prevent these students once in Australia from entering the virtual education field. Of course, this is encouraged from their home countries via online mediums. The educational institutions also desperately require this physical presence. Without students physically presenting themselves at their respective campuses, these institutions would not exist. The result is that online material for students who are designated *international* is not a growth area and thus one that very few academics delve into. It is little wonder then that when I encountered a situation in 2009 where international students studying in Australia failed to submit an online assessment, I could find very little literature to support and guide me.

As can be seen from my early work in this area, what exactly the terms “online”, “blended”, “augmented” and “electronic” were deemed to indicate in education were almost impossible to determine. There was even confusion as to whether information communication technology (ICT) and information technology (IT) were one and the same or different topics. It is because of this that the first section of this literature review was written early in the project in an attempt to solidify these very fluid notions. Consequently, Section 1 is a brief history of ICT and its associated terminology.

Once terminology has been established, a review of the literature surrounding the specific topic of this study can be undertaken. As will be seen later in this thesis, for many years I was actually working on a misapprehension. It was my contention, in those early years, that Newgarth University had inadvertently collected together students who, as a result of their habitus, had adopted a learning style, which created a reluctance to participate in online education. My original focus for

the study was “Does habitus affect learning-style inventories in relation to electronic learning management systems?” As such, my literature review reflected this in Section 2. I was almost correct. Habitus did play a part in what occurred though not exactly how I had originally envisaged.

Section 3 examines literature in the area of Kolb’s (1984) theory of learning-style inventories. In particular, the notion that learning styles are not related to culture. This line of research was itself a failure, however the section is the important link in this research. My original contention was that it was the student’s culture which dictated the learning style that created resistance to online learning. Kolb and Joy’s later research established that this was not the case (Chapman, 2010; Joy & Kolb, 2009). Their research suggests that students will adopt a learning style that is required by the discipline/field that they will be engaged in. This link leads directly to Bourdieu’s theory of fields.

In Section 4, this section reflects the final stage of the study. The notion of habitus is examined in this section, in particular how Pierre Bourdieu utilises habitus in his theory of fields. The final reconfiguration of the focus question “Does habitus affect a cohort of student’s perception of electronic learning management systems?” relates to this section. I have in this section demonstrated that Bourdieusian fields are a natural consequence of the international student industry in Australia. Also, within this industry there is a prevalence for the occurrence of symbolic power and symbolic violence. As will be seen, the data that was collected was reinterpreted from application to the individual to application to the collective, in doing so a notion emerged. This notion was that the students had created groups within “fields”, in Bourdieu’s terms, and it was the operation of these groups that dictated how the students would react to symbolic violence.

The intention of the research was to investigate and analyse the possible interconnectedness between habitus and learning-style inventories. The result of the research was that there was actually very little interconnectedness. This was due to learning styles not being set in stone. They are fluid and can change depending on the situational context. The literature will show that a student will always prefer one learning style to another; however, unless there is a learning disability, students can and will change their style of learning depending on their current context.

The first two aims of the study were to identify what occurred in 2009 that caused this cohort of student to resist a small online assessment. Having determined what actually occurred, is it possible to analyse the event to create an understanding of the social political and cultural interplays? This has been achieved; though not through the study’s original hypothesis that an individual student’s educational background is the main determining factor in their acceptance of ICT and the assessment in question. Subsequent reflection of the research suggests that while this may be true, the collective habitus of the student cohort determined their course of action in a given set of circumstances.

The last section of this literature review focuses on this reflection. Consequently, this study evolved into an examination of those circumstances and how they affected the students’ perceptions of an online assessment task. The time line of the literature review covers the entire period from 2007 to 2012.

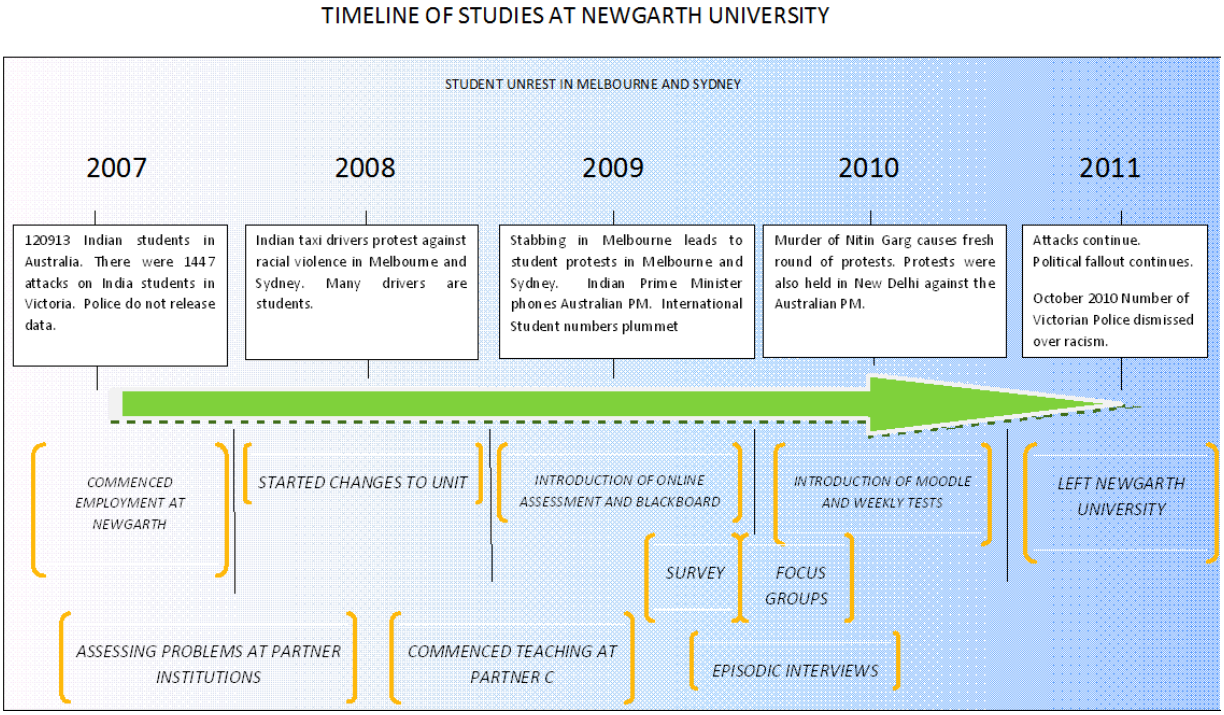



*Figure 6.* The time line of the literature review covers the entire from 2007 to 2012.

## 2.2 History and Context of ICT, Blended Learning and Online Learning

To position this section within the scope of the thesis, it is necessary to remember that the incident which was the catalyst for the study was an assessment task set in 2009, which students could undertake by accessing the task in an electronic format on the Blackboard LMS of Newgarth University via the internet. The assessment task was given to a cohort of students, the majority of whom were studying in Australia on international student visas (there were a few on refugee visas). The term normally associated with accessing material on the world wide web is *going online*. It was only in late 2017 that a major Australian university changed the designation of their distance education units to call them *online* units. This raises the question of what is understood by the term *online* and, as a consequence, did this comply with the permissible structure of the teaching systems allowed by the Australian Government in 2009. Before any exploration of the application of these terms is possible, it is necessary to define what they are. The Honourable Tony Blair (the then-Prime Minister of Great Britain) also came to the conclusion that these definitions were required; as a result, he commissioned Dennis Stevenson, the chairman of the trustees of the Tate Gallery, to define just what electronic augmentation of teaching was. The results of the Stevenson report have been adopted around the world in the education field (Stevenson, 1996). Australia was no different, enshrining the recommendations of this report into legislation, The Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000, (The ESOS Act 2000 (Cth))(Australian Federal Parliament, 2000). This legislation, in turn, indirectly contributed to the international student education industry in Australia. Thus, as a lawyer, and I apologise to the reader that old habits die hard, my point of embarkation of this or any other literature review is with the primary literary source – that of legislation. In this case, Commonwealth legislation to be precise, closely followed by State legislation. In reviewing such parliamentary writings, I bring to the readers' attention a sad reflection on law; that it is often out of step with the needs of the community it represents. To quote Hegel – a quote common in law and

one I have often used in court when defending a client's actions that are strictly unlawful but accepted as the norms of a modern society – "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only when the shades of night are gathering" (Hegel, 1820, p. preface, Preface to Philosophy of Right).

In law, the concept is that the reasonableness of past actions is founded in the context of the present. Alternatively, colloquially put, that the law does not keep pace with modern expectations. The law in this situation relating to international students studying in Australia is a prime example of this effect. International students' resident in Australia are effectively prohibited, or at least extremely restricted, from taking fully online education in Australia by such legislation. It was only in 2018 that the national standards contained within the ESOS Act were changed to allow a 30% online component (a change from 25% prior to 2018) of an international student's degree. Because of this lack of activity in fully online units, little academic literature on the topic of their experiences has been generated.

While there is literature on the use of internet resources in education (Birrel, 2018; Hughes, 2005; Kung, 2017; Novak & Cowling, 2008; Sun Hee & Woodrow, 2008; Suryani, 2007; Tan, 2018) and literature as to the formation of new universities (the so called new universities in post WWII England ) (Maton, 2006). There still appears to be little academic literature that specifically researches international students in blended learning models in Australia. An analysis of 1443 abstracts in EBSCO, (Elton B. Stephens Co. Publishing) conducted in December 2018, for a Boolean search of "online learning" plus "international students" revealed only 72 abstracts actually dealt with the use of online or blended learning for international students in Australia. Of these, 28 related to non-higher education. MOOC's (Massive Open Online Courses) were the subject of another 16 articles, which are not the ambit of this study. A further 10 dealt with the situation where international students had travelled to New Zealand to experience the culture but took online units in their home country (Earl & Cong, 2011). This would suggest that they were, in fact, domestic students taking online courses. Within the abstracts, there was also confusion as to whether Australian domestic students taking online units overseas and overseas students taking online courses in Australia without the need for student visas, qualify as international students, as the government Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS) base their statistics on student visas. However, the proliferation of blended learning in all universities both nationally and internationally would suggest that international students studying in Australia are using these resources at almost the same level as Australian domestic students and other overseas students. Minerva's owl would suggest that implementing the online assessment at the centre of this study was a reasonable thing to do and that legislative policies have not kept up with modern trends. Because there is little specific research in this Australian context, much of the literature reviewed here is from jurisdictions outside Australia and the experiences must be viewed in that light.

I would like to bring to the reader's attention that the online assessment at the centre of this study was instigated under the implementation of what Newgarth University had termed its "blended learning" program (see Chapter 1, p2). The use of this term was misleading at best. It is here, then, that the review of the literature commences. The pedagogy of blended learning does not fall within the Australian Government's Department of Education's definition of either "distance learning" and "online leaning" (Department Of Education, 2007). The Department of Education provided a national code (Department Of Education, 2007) for providers of educational services to international students pursuant to the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) framework under the *Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000* (Cth) and its associated regulations, *ESOS Regulations 2001* (Cth). Released in 2007, Standard 9 of this National Code allows international students to study up to 25 per cent of their courses by either online or distance learning or both. As at June 2017, these

standards have remained unchanged and unamended. In 2008 these standards were changed to allow for a 30% online component of a degree.

The Department of Education's explanatory guide for Standard 9 defines some of the terminology used: "Distance learning is study in which the teacher and overseas student are separated in time or space throughout the duration of the unit of study" (Department Of Education, 2007)(Department of Education, 2007, Explanatory guide for Standard 9).

Distance learning differs from online learning in that the study may be undertaken through written correspondence and exchange of hard copy materials: "Online learning is study in which the teacher and overseas student communicate mainly through electronic technologies for the unit…" (Department of Education, 2007, Explanatory guide for Standard 9).

*In the 2018 amendments standard 8 states "*Registered providers may offer overseas students up to one-third of their course online. If online or distance learning is offered, the registered provider must ensure that the overseas student is studying at least one unit that is face-to-face in each study period. The only exception is if the overseas student is completing the last unit of their course that is only available online."

The introduction of these definitions in the National Code had several consequences. First, it attempts to explain and standardise the terminology being used in education. The definition of a course of studies for international students is a course that is registered with CRICOS and that course must contain individual units. The duration of a course is also registered – for example, a bachelor course is expected to be of three years' duration; a masters course is expected to take an additional two years. [18, 19]

This seemingly simple definition of a course of study created problems at Newgarth University, where different terminology was used due to the adoption of an American electronic student management system (SMS). Courses, according to the Newgarth SMS, were the components that made up the programs. As such, due to a misinterpretation of the National Code, management at the Business School of Newgarth University argued no "course" (or unit in CRICOS terms) could contain more than a 25 per cent online component. This interpretation was later proved incorrect by the requirement from AUQA (Australian Universities Quality Agency) that the amount of "blended learning" in the Business School's unit offerings be increased (see Chapter 4, Section 4).

Another consequence of these definitions was that Newgarth University staff saw the National Code as prohibiting, or at least severely restricting, international students from undertaking fully online

[18] [Note: In 2007, generically though some universities differed, this was based on an awarded-points system over two teaching periods (semesters) a year. A standard Masters degree comprised a 200-point course over 2 years' full-time study. This equated to 100 points a year or 8 x 12.5-point units (4 units a semester for each of the 2 semesters). Masters units at an AQF (Australian Qualification framework) of 9 are deemed to be worth 12.5 points undergraduate units at AQF 7–8 are deemed to be worth 8–10 points. Universities, such as the University of New England in 2015, now offer the equivalent of a 4-year law degree in 2.6 years by having a trimester year (three teaching periods). This still contains the equivalent of 8 teaching periods of 50 points. (University Of New England, 2015) With the rise in popularity of "intensive classes", it is conceivably now possible to offer a 200-point course in a 12-month period: for example 8 teaching periods of 6 weeks each with 2 units a teaching period; 16 x 12.5 = 200 points.]

[19] However, the points system is an arbitrary measurement of academic course progression in Australia as no standardisation has been established. The possibility and probability of 7-week semesters was raised by Battye and Carter in their 2009 Report On The Review Of Online And Blended Learning at the University of Canberra (Battye & Carter, 2009) In 2017 and 2018 at a Melbourne "partner institution", I am now teaching a 9-week semester.

units. In educational institutions such as those that partnered with Newgarth University, which specifically targeted international students, no fully online units were offered. Students were only allowed to take fully online units if they were outside of the courses the students were registered with CRICOS as undertaking, or if the students needed to take a unit (for example, to finish a course, or for a prerequisite), and that unit was not being offered in a face-to-face delivery mode. This was compliant with Standard 13 of the National Code. Students in such a situation are then allowed to take a similar online unit and cross-credit.

The reporting requirements set out in the regulations ensured that despite educational institutions such as universities, where students had the ability to enrol in face-to-face delivery mode units, then have access to the online material used in the online version of the unit, the students were still required to attend classes. This requirement to attend classes was not explicitly set out in the National Code prior to 2018 but was implied in the respective institution's mandatory reporting requirements to the Commonwealth Government on the individual student's progress via the Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS) website. This was revised in the 2018 amendment: an 80% attendance is required for school course, ELICOS or Foundation Program. However, the 2018 national standard 8 does not set a minimum attendance for international students. The onus is placed on the institution to monitor, document and implement satisfactory progress. Ironically, rather than being restrictive, the explanatory guide for the pre 2018 Standard 9 termed the 25 per cent online component as an expansion of the students' available choices and claims that this standard provides the "students with greater flexibility in managing students' study loads over the duration of the course" (Department Of Education, 2007 National Code Part D, Standard 9). Newgarth University's implementation of its blended learning program demonstrates that in 2009 there was confusion surrounding the terminology used by the National Code in relation to online education and blended learning.

Blended learning is the use of information communication technology (ICT) that is integrated into face-to-face teaching and learning (Dziuban, et al., 2004). The terms ICT, online learning, and blended learning are extremely common yet somewhat amorphous in today's education circles. An examination of their origins indicates that in 1996, Stevenson (1996) and his team added the word "communication" to the term "information technology" (IT) to introduce the term "information communication technology" (ICT). The parameters of the term are ill-defined in his report *Independent Inquiry into the Use of IT in Schools* (Stevenson, 1996) as "reflect[ing] the increasing role of both information and communication technologies in all aspects of society" (Stevenson, 1996, p 12). The Stevenson report (1996) suggests, without being specific, that technology refers to interconnected hardware that uses software to achieve communication and information dissemination. Information communication technology, as specifically referred to in Stevenson's (1996) report, differs from IT in general in that the reliance on interconnection for communication is central.

The definitional differences between distance learning and online learning (Department of Education, 2007) and blended learning, in the intervening years between 2007 and the present day (2017) present something of a quandary. The definition of online learning from the Department of Education was not compatible with Battye and Carter's definition. Battye and Carter (2009, at p 11) defined blended learning as "A strategic and considered approach to teaching and learning that effectively integrates different models of teaching and styles whereby both face-to-face and online learning are each made better by the presence of the other" (p. 11). In blended learning, the main communication is normally via face-to-face communication. Gosper and Woo (2007) recommend that all electronic augmentation of teaching be placed under the umbrella term of *e-learning* to remove confusion. Battye and Carter (2009) do not agree with this notion on the basis that it

suggests e-learning is different from mainstream learning. Battye and Carter (2009) believe that attempting to standardise terminology is not helpful. As can be seen from the confusion surrounding definitions in electronically augmented teaching, the lack of standardisation has created an ongoing situation of confusion and misunderstanding.

In terms of the difference between distance learning, blended learning and online learning, it is difficult these days to find an Australian institution that offers purely hard copy correspondence education as in the Department of Education's definition of distance learning. An internet search of 263 Australian educational providers in both higher education (HE) and vocational education training (VET) between 1 and 10 January 2015 could not produce one provider who exclusively used hard copy materials. In most cases, university textbooks are offered in an e-book version. In all cases, at least some links were given to materials such as legislation, regulations, commentaries, or professional/academic journals online. In most cases, the cost of printing and postage had been transferred from the educational provider to the student by the provision of materials in an electronic form. The growing use of anti-plagiarism tools, such as *Turnitin*, also makes the receiving of hard copy assessments less desirable to the academic.

In the universities that I have personally been associated with in the past 10 years, both as student and staff, it was standard that even face-to-face students were required to submit assignments in an electronic form via an anti-plagiarism tool. Video conferencing was common in most units and those that used learning management systems (LMS) had electronic forums as standard. Some units now use social media not only as a method of communication but as a component of teaching (Backer, 2009; Suryani, 2007). It is this mix of ICT and face-to-face education that has become commonly known as blended learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). However, many, if not the majority of these units, still only use electronic means to replace the hard copy of teaching materials. In such cases, the LMS's are simply a repository for the unit materials that in the past had been given in hard copy, thereby transferring the cost of printing to the students. (I remember my trepidation when arriving for my first year at law school to be given eight – yes, eight – of those cardboard boxes, which photocopy paper comes in, containing my reading material for the semester. An entrepreneurial second-year student with a wheelbarrow would take the reading material to your car for $5.00).

For a unit to be termed blended learning, the electronic component must not only enhance the face-to-face component of the unit's two forms of teaching but must also be so inextricably linked that teaching the unit is not possible without both components (Battye & Carter, 2009; Skelton, 2009). Simply using an electronic repository is electronically enhancing the unit. For example, a library with electronic resources is still a library despite the form that the data is collected in or interfaced with. When teaching is constructed in such a manner that there is a seamless integration of all forms of media used in the unit, it becomes blended learning. Dziuban et al. (2004), as a result of their research at a United States university, suggest that blended learning has the potential to improve learning outcomes while lowering attrition rates. Whilst optimistically cautious, suggesting that the potential is there for improvement for students using blended learning, they do not commit to the result that an improvement will occur. Recent news articles suggest that their caution was correct and that attrition rates in Australian universities have, in fact, been rising over the past decade (Burke, 2016; Burton-Bradly, 2018; Moodie, 2016; Moodie, 2013).

The ongoing problem of what constituted blended learning and how it was defined was encountered when discussing this study with both participants and peers. For the use of this study, it was decided a prudent path was to categorise the various delivery modes by characteristics rather than definitions. The characteristics which predominantly recur in the literature are those initially set out

by Dziuban et al. (2004). The characteristics, which Dziuban et al. (2004) attribute to blended learning, are as follows:

- A shift from lecture-centred to student-centred instruction in which students become active and interactive learners.
- Increases in interaction between student instructor, student–student, student content and student–outside resources.
- Integrated assessment mechanisms for students and instructors.

The presence of integrated assessment mechanisms appears to be the one characteristic which (when combined with other characteristic) allows for a differential of blended learning from other modes even if the mechanism is simply the ability to submit essays online.

The implementation of blended learning at the University of Newgarth was further complicated by the operation of satellite campuses operated by partner institutions.

#### 2.2.1 Summary.

From 1996 to 2016, the use of ICT in teaching grew at an exponential rate. It is regarded as a method by which the education industry can be revolutionised, creating cost-efficient, flexible environments that do not have the need for the magnificent but costly bluestone and sandstone edifices.

The newness of the online environment is still being explored. In my own experience, I have taken the online phenomena into the most remote and inhospitable places of the Australian tropical regions. I have also conducted online lectures with Australian defence force personnel who were on patrol in the Indo-Pacific Ocean, on the ice shelfs in Antarctica, in Afghanistan, cycling across the Andes and even relaxing on a mountaintop in Austria.

The phenomenon of electronic-augmented teaching environments opens up possibilities previously unavailable. Each new application, however, brings with it new problems. In the case of something that has the potential to be cross-cultural, the issue of standardisation and translation does not seem to have been given the attention it deserves. As such, in the case of this study, what was requested to be provided, what was provided, and what was expected to be received were all vastly different things, yet they all fell under the amorphous heading of “blended learning.”

## 2.3 How Students Perceive Online Learning

My first fully online education experience was to undertake my New Zealand legal professional practice certificate. For the first time in 2002, this was being offered online by an Australian institution. I had to go into work after hours to study because my home dial-up speed on my faithful “486” was just not sufficient to enable the materials to be delivered online. The assessments would “time out” before they were loaded. Unfortunately, the “firewalls” at the university where I worked also kept blocking the online assessments from working. It was incredibly frustrating. I telephoned the IT technician at the Australian institute where I was enrolled to see if the problem could be fixed. The reply was “good luck with that. Let me know how you get it fixed!” I don’t think I had ever felt so isolated in my life as I felt at that point. I had to pass this certificate to practise and keep my job. I had paid cold, hard cash to take this course. (I did not have much. I earned less as a junior lawyer than I did the previous year as a full-time student pumping petrol part time). The course was not

working. I was the only one in New Zealand taking the course and the nearest help was some cocky Aussie 3000 km away, whose words of wisdom were “good luck.”

My personal perceptions of online education at that time are not able to be published in print. During the process of researching the online assessment task incident at the centre of this study, I came across Hara and Kling’s (1999) article on students’ frustration with online education. This article brought back to me memories of freezing-cold nights alone in the mausoleum of that university with steadily and increasingly rising panic, cursing and questioning the parentage of some poor, unknowing Australian. The thought occurred to me that I may just have done the very same thing to my students. Possibly, there was absolutely nothing wrong with the course, the assessment nor the hardware. Possibly the problem lay with how the students themselves perceived the assessment. Were they in turn inflicting some terrible traditional curse on me for subjecting them to such isolation and frustration? In order to determine if this indeed was the case, I searched the relevant literature that addressed how students perceive online learning and its requisite componentry.

The academic husband-and-wife team of Diane and James Oblinger (2005) highlight the difficulties where the “net” generation of students (according to the Oblingers, those born between 1980 and 2000) intersects with higher education. Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) concede that no matter how often they played video games they, as parents, did not have the visual spatial skills of their children when it came to interaction with modern technology. They state that their children, even their youngest at 10 years old, have a digital literacy that eludes them, not just as parents, but as educators.

The literature supports Oblinger and Oblinger’s (2005) claim that children born within the Net Generation , and beyond, are technologically proficient and are predominant in the ICT field (Backer., 2010; S. Bennet & K. Maton, 2010; Demetriadis et al., 2002; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Kisla, Arikan, & Sarsar, 2009; M. Prensky, 2001a; M. Prensky, 2001b, 2004; Safford & Stinton, 2016; Shuker, 2001). There is a body of literature that suggests every child of the Net Generation is automatically initiated into technology language by exposure to the technology itself. This suggestion must be taken with caution. Backer (2009) notes that 60 per cent of her class experienced technical difficulties in attempting to use new technology. Other researchers in education have noted similar experiences (Akkoyunlu & Yilmaz-Soylu, 2008; Backer., 2010; Battye & Carter, 2009; Bennet & Maton, 2010; Hara & Kling, 1999; Hunt, Thomas, & Eagle, 2002; Iriarte Díaz-Granados, Dominguez, Ricardo, & Fontalvo, 2009; Safford & Stinton, 2016; Selwyn, 2003). The outcome of the survey conducted in association with this thesis demonstrated that a little over half of the international students surveyed are comfortable using the internet as well as some saying they are not even sure whether they are using it or not. Thus, despite what is an often-argued perception (Zimic, 2009) or at least an “often-unproblematised” (Zimic, 2009, p. 131) position, not every person has access to electronic education materials, and not every person is “techno savvy.” This has also been pointed out by others ( Bennet & Maton, 2010; Howe & Strauss, 2003; Safford & Stinton, 2016).

Šorgo, Bartol, Dolnicar, and Boh Podgornik (2016) also point out that simply owning equipment such as smartphones and laptops is no indication that the owner will have, what they term, information literacy (Šorgo, Bartol, Dolničar, & Boh Podgornik, 2016). The lack of technical expertise is not limited to international students. Backer’s (2010) students undertaking an assessment using smartphones experienced difficulties with what could be considered common technology. All Backer’s (2010) students were Australian domestic students who undertook the course knowing that the use of electronic media would be required. Backer’s (2010) statistics are consistent with those of the survey conducted for my study.

The outcome of the survey for this study suggests that 60 per cent of those students surveyed, for an unknown reason, will experience difficulties if asked to undertake assessment online (Saunders, 2010) and 40 per cent would not be able to complete the task (Saunders, 2007a, 2010). In a world where technology is advancing at an exponential rate, the increased use of the internet and its associated proliferation of internet browsing tools make a myriad of information devices available at a level never before known (Backer, 2010; Bennet & Maton, 2010; Demetriadis et al., 2002; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Kisla et al., 2009; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Prensky, 2001a; Prensky, 2001b, 2004; Shuker, 2001; Trumble, 1999; Tymczynska, 2009). Terms such as "internet protocols", "web browsers", "operating systems" and, perhaps the best known of all, "Google it" (Urban Dictionary, 2015) are now common parlance in community circles (Howe & Strauss, 2003; McNeely, 2005; Roberts, 2005; Truesdell, 2007; Windham, 2005).

With a plethora of websites offering information, advice and direction, students have expectations that specific education providers should provide even more material and in a manner better presented than that of the average website (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Kung, 2017; McNeely, 2005; Roberts, 2005; Truesdell, 2007; Windham, 2005). The rationale for this study itself was to investigate why students did not accept assessment provided on an LMS (Saunders, 2007a, 2010), a problem that has also been addressed by other scholars ((Akkoyunlu & Yilmaz-Soylu, 2008; Battye & Carter, 2009; Bennet & Maton, 2010; Demetriadis et al., 2002; Hara & Kling, 1999; Hunt et al., 2002; Truesdell, 2007)

If, based upon the outcomes of the quantitative features of this study, ICT-based assessments are compulsory ones forced upon higher-education students, there are dangers of discrimination against those who do not have access to electronic media, or perhaps more importantly, have not had access to in the past, or simply do not know how to use it (Hunt et al., 2002; Safford & Stinton, 2016; Šorgo et al., 2016). There are dangers of discrimination against those who do not learn well or as effectively in a virtual setting (Akkoyunlu & Yilmaz-Soylu, 2008; Safford & Stinton, 2016; Saunders, 2010; Šorgo et al., 2016; Wang, Wang, Wang, & Huang, 2006; Ward, Chitty, & Noble, 2009). These dangers may be compounded if, as Battye and Carter (2009) suggest, accelerated learning, made possible by ICTs, allows for seven-week semesters in higher education.

One of the justifications for my research is to investigate ways in which so called "techno savvy" students' (Zimic, 2009) socio-education backgrounds can shape their learning style to the extent that it reduces their ability to access possible benefits of electronic learning and tuition. Skelton (2009) found that unless the New Zealand students believed that the electronic material was a core component of the unit, they would filter it out and disregard it. Prensky (2001b) believes that young students simply think differently and process information differently. This processing of information appears to be simply efficient time management strategies to deal with masses of information. Skelton's (2009) study at the Eastern Institute of Technology in Napier, New Zealand, specifically monitored the use of Moodle as the institution's LMS vehicle for blended learning.

The acronym "Moodle" stands for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (Tymczynska, 2009). It is a web-based education program, which has been developed to allow educators to create interactive and collaborative online material for students. It is a kinetic or tactile learning system where students learn by doing. In the Napier study, the students were domestic (it is assumed) full-time undergraduate bachelor students, studying business and information technology. The assumption of the study was that ICT students had some prior experiences in computer-based education. The students all had access to the LMS Moodle. Skelton (2009) does not specify that training was given in the use of the LMS. The outcomes of the study suggest that the LMS's were

sufficient to fulfil all the requirements of a suitable blended-learning environment. Skelton (2009) added a cautious note:

> The extent to which the use of a system like Moodle should be deployed is still unclear from the quantitative results. Students' results in this study tend to suggest that e-learning is viewed as supplementing rather than substituting classroom experiences, at least initially. (Skelton, 2009, p. 111)

Skelton (2009) concludes that despite the LMS pedagogically fulfilling all the criteria for operation in a blended-learning environment (Dziuban, et al., 2004), the students perceived the LMS in their learning environment to be an ancillary resource. Skelton (2009) suggests that cultural influences and previous background experience may influence the degree of acceptance by the student cohort.

Similar concerns regarding students' perceptions of the online learning environment have been the subject of a great many studies. Picciano (2002) found that students who felt the social presence of others in the course fared much better than those who remained isolated. Ballard, Stapleton, and Carroll (2004) found that, overall, there was a positive attitude to a website set up as an LMS for a face-to-face course, but found that it was favoured as an information dissemination tool rather than a pedagogical device. Graven, Helland, and MacKinnon (2006) conducted a nine-year longitudinal study of the influence that ICT had on students' satisfaction and found, interestingly, that satisfaction levels stayed constant over the length of the study despite the advances in technology; however, the students did require better resources.

This point was highlighted in a study conducted in Australia by Lilje, Krishnan and Peat (2006), where the students were not provided with sufficient resources. They initially suggest in their study that the students' perceptions of the use of online components in a human biology class were positive. The article goes on to describe a situation where an independent essay task was given to two groups of students (face-to-face and online) in 2005 and 2006. The article reports that the 2006 online students' perceptions of the usefulness of the task had greatly deteriorated from the face-to-face class of 2005.

The authors suggest that a lack of feedback to the students may be responsible for this result. Johnson (2006), in a smaller study, noted that the different goals of increasing ICT use in hybrid (blended) learning and online learning required different strategies that cannot be intermingled. Thus, what works in a face-to-face class of general spontaneous feedback to students of their performance in a given task will not work in an online situation, where careful consideration must be given to the method, timing and composition of feedback. In an online situation, this may be the only credible indicator given of the individual students' performance.

In an interesting USA study, (Smart & Cappel, 2006) discovered that where the unit/course was a core compulsory offering, the students found the online components marginally negative. By comparison, where the unit/course was offered as an elective subject, students found the same online components marginally positive. The authors stress the importance of a careful rollout of blended learning and integration of learning materials online.

A comparison of Skelton's (2009) New Zealand Study and Ng and Tsoi's (2008) Hong Kong study suggests that the New Zealand students were less accepting than the Hong Kong students in relation to relying on the LMS.

Ng and Tsoi's (2008) study used Dziuban et al.'s (2004) model by applying similar surveying techniques to students studying sub-degree business courses at a community college in Hong Kong. Their study shows that a potential benefit to the student from blended learning does exist. Ng and

Tsoi (2008) present this outcome with a caveat. They have interpreted their outcomes as indicating that a benefit only exists if the students' perceptions of the benefits are justified, and the students see a practical application. They argue that the benefit should be apparent and transparent to the students from the outset; they posit that there is some tangible, practical benefit for the student from undertaking the extra work expected of them.

Ng and Tsoi (2008) suggest that blended learning is a manifestation of flexible learning techniques. They argue that the provision of materials in different modes gives the students a choice of access to information aurally and visually, through print media, community interaction or personal presentation, or in any combination which best suits the students' learning styles and their education cultural backgrounds. This, they argue, provides flexibility for the students to study at times and places which are the most conducive to their particular situations within a controlled framework. Blended learning further enhances this experience by integrating assessment into this program and converting it into a formative teaching tool by which the student may then progress through each module of the course at their own pace (Barrington, 2003). As mentioned previously, Ng and Tsoi (2008) identified that students', instructors' and administrators' issues need to be significantly addressed for a successful introduction of blended learning.

Ng and Tsoi's (2008) first area of concern is students; these are described as the intended beneficiaries of blended-learning implementation. As with other studies (Backer, 2010; McNeely, 2005; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009a; Ng & Tsoi, 2008; Sun, Lin, & Yu, 2005; Truesdell, 2007), Ng and Tsoi (2008) raised concerns in relation to the accessibility of materials, and the methods by which they would be accessed. It has already been mentioned that the literature in general argues that it cannot be assumed that all students are homogeneously immersed in technological advancement. The same literature suggests that students' concerns in relation to increased stress and time commitment required to learn and use new technology and processes be taken into account.

In relation to instructors, Ng and Tsoi (2008) cite similar technology issues as those that are experienced by students. In their 2008 study, they found that inexperience, and lack of technical support and course design instruction, imposed difficulties on course co-ordinators, and instructors.

I noted similar difficulties in my study in which the instructors at Newgarth University's partner institution are sessional (Saunders, 2009). These instructors, with specified time allocations for teaching and student contact, considered that there were no emotional or financial incentives to invest personal time in learning and adopting new technology (Saunders, 2009). Garrison and Vaughan (2008) suggest that this may create a conflict. They cite Levy (2005), who wrote that e-learning "is marked by a juxtaposition of new technology and old pedagogy" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 7). Garrison and Vaughan (2008) claim that the "mistake of traditional campus-based institutions" (p. 7) is to see the use of LMS as a means to increase student numbers without significant capital outlay, rather than seeing LMS as a resource by which to improve the learning environment of the student. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) also say that "serving students better from a learning perspective would necessitate the adoption of a new pedagogy" (p. 7).

In the study for this thesis, I noted that the Business School at Newgarth University had not followed the suggestions of Garrison and Vaughan (2008), nor the model used by Ng and Tsoi (2008) in Hong Kong. Rather, up to 2009, the Business School had concentrated on pilot programs to establish sustainability of the implementations of LMS. These pilot programs were further hampered because the required hardware and specialised staff training had only been provided on a spasmodic, piecemeal basis (Saunders, 2007b). This piecemeal strategy of rolling out the implementation of in 2009 the LMS is contrary to the processes recommended by Garrison and Vaughan (2008), who

provide a practical method of blended-learning implementation in higher-education institutions. Chan and Law (Chan & Law, 2007) underline the imperative of structured training sessions for both staff and students to implement blended learning. They suggest that this training is not only in relation to the structure and use of the LMS, but also to adapt to a new pedagogy as recommended by Battye and Carter (2009) and Garrison and Vaughan (2008). All four researchers also suggest that training be given in the use of formative assessment.

Ng and Tsoi's (2008) third factor, that of administration, cite the main concerns from the stakeholders in Hong Kong as being operating costs, quality of education, and student enrolments and retention. These same issues have been identified by other studies (Battye & Carter, 2009; Bennet & Maton, 2010; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Hara & Kling, 1999; M. Prensky, 2001a; M. Prensky, 2001b, 2004; Thomas, 2002).

The influence of these concerns in the Newgarth University environment demonstrates their importance. Until full implementation has occurred, the cost/benefit ratios cannot be calculated effectively. This suggests that while there will be a quantifiable economic outlay for the parent university in the piecemeal rollout strategy scenario, the benefits in relation to student retention and increased student enrolment because of the recognition of quality education through word of mouth cannot be determined.

An awareness of the difficulties of introducing blended learning is highlighted in the final draft to the University of Canberra by Battye and Carter (2009) in their report on the *Review of Online and Blended Learning*. The report identifies institutional and infrastructure benefits to the university with the adoption of blended learning. Although this report is supportive of the concept of blended learning, the nine recommendations made, it does warn of a required shift in pedagogy of the entire teaching faculty to accommodate the recommendations. Battye and Carter (2009) also argue that a shift in focus is required, one which includes recognition of student-centred pedagogy and of the role played by staff acceptance of that pedagogy, as well as a willingness to embrace new modes of delivery via utilisation of new technology.

In addition, Battye and Carter (2009) recognise the importance of providing appropriate ICT resources to students to enable them to access the required LMS. The need for access to ICT resources has been echoed in a short poster paper by Li (2008), who suggests that it is not enough to provide access to an LMS such as Moodle. While Moodle is a freeware program, its success depends greatly "on the capabilities of the IT team within the business" (Li, 2008, poster) or institution to be able to modify the program sufficiently to provide a resource which is applicable and sympathetic to the needs of the course and the students. Li (2008) further suggests that once this is achieved, institutions put their pedagogy strategy in place prior to implementation to allow for induction training. Li (2008) urges that a product like Moodle may not be the most suitable for an application simply because it is freeware, cautioning that "the flexibility of the interoperability of the product and the organisation culture should also be considered" (Li, 2008, poster).

The literature tends to support the argument that the necessary criteria for a successful blended-learning environment is the ease of use of the LMS for students, staff and institution infrastructure, enhanced support for the LMS electronic environment, perceived benefit for the students by the students, and academic and community cultural acceptance of an individual or segregated learning environment.

**2.3.1 Summary.** While Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) suggest that the world is full of a new Net Generation of electronically smart individuals, the extent of this Net Generation seems to be overstated. There is, however, a much greater

consciousness amongst all students for the need of greater time management strategies. These strategies are needed in their personal lives to juggle the demands of studies, fees, work, and social life in a world that continues not just 24 hours a day but 24 hours a day across 24 time zones. Where electronic enhancement of a course of study can make a student's life easier, they will adopt it. If electronic componentry is added to a course simply because it is possible, and adds no academic value to the outcome, then students will discard this material as quickly as they discard the daily bombardment of tweets, texts, and emails that are of no interest. Where electronic componentry is added to a course of study to transfer cost and learning time to students, those students will see a devaluation of the product and protest (see Chapter 7). With this in mind, educators who construct electronic componentry need to ensure that any material adds value to the course of study for the participants of that course.

## 2.4 The Effect of Culture on Learning Styles

In the previous section, I led the reader through the maze to arrive at the suggestion that students will adopt or reject online material based upon their perceptions of its importance to their study. This was apparent in both the Hong Kong and New Zealand cases. It is Skelton (2009) who suggests that cultural influences and previous background experiences may influence the degree of acceptance from the student cohort. I have previously introduced Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz-Soylu (2008) and their Turkish study. These authors also conclude that students' perceptions of online material influence the degree of acceptance. In the Turkish study, they also suggest that the degree of acceptance may be a result of the students' learning style. The research into learning styles was for the purposes of this study found to be a dead end. It is accepted that all students will have a preferred learning style. A cultural background does not dictate that style. A cultural background will however, in general dictate how the student will react to, or act upon feedback given to them. As such, despite most of the research and data collection for this thesis being directed towards Kolb's (1984) concept of *learning style inventories, the concept* is only given a cursory examination in this literature review for completeness.

Kolb (1984) developed the concept of *learning style inventories* in 1984 to categorise the methods that different people use to learn. The concept of a learning styles inventory is based on a method of categorising the ways in which a student learns (Kolb, 1984). A review of the literature suggests a consensus among researchers that, while people learn in different ways, all students will have a preferred way of learning (Akkoyyunlu, & Yilmaz-Soylu, M., 2008; Iriarte Díaz-Granados et al., 2009; Kolb, 1984; Sun et al., 2005; Wang et al., 2006; Ward et al., 2009). Kolb (1984) suggests that people learn by seeing, listening, doing and thinking, on continuums of perception and processing. Different people learn by a preferred combination of these activities (Kolb, 1984). Kolb (1984) created the learning style inventory (LSI) with the intention of helping educators to determine an individual's learning styles on a continuing cycle (see Figure 7).

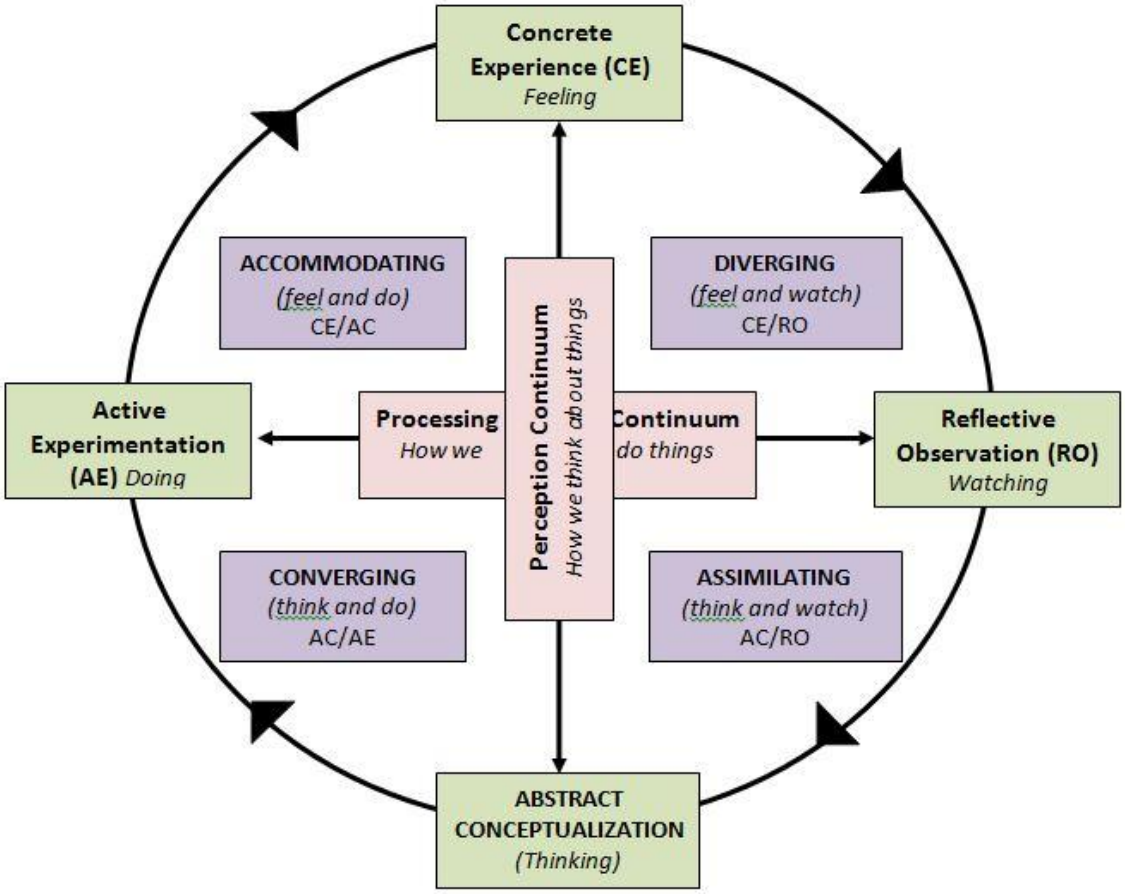



*Figure 7. Kolb's learning styles.* From Algonquin College, School of Health and Community Studies. Module Three: Personal Learning Styles. Online. Anonymous, Unpaginated. http://www.algonquincollege.com/healthandcommunity/preceptorship/module-three/personal-learning-styles/

The cycle includes the categories of concrete experience, abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation and reflective observation (Kolb, 1984). This combination of categories is developed to relate to each of the four different learning styles identified by Kolb (1984). According to Kolb (1984), common characteristics are displayed by individuals with a similar learning style (see Figure 7). Kolb's (1984) four learning styles are as follows:

1. Experience – looks at thing as they are.
2. Abstract conceptualisation – looks at these same things in a way which relates to their concepts.
3. Active experimentation – takes the concepts and tries to prove its application.
4. Reflective observation – takes the same concept but observes to determine its true application.

The learning styles were then applied to different groups of learners to categorise how these groups prefer to learn. The groups are called *Divergers*, *Assimilators*, *Convergers* and *Accommodators*. Descriptions of the groups are as follows:

1. *Divergers* – use actual experience and apply lateral thinking to resolve problems by innovative methods.

2. *Assimilators* – use the experience to create conceptual models of behaviour, or theories.
3. *Convergers* – are the diagnostic problem solvers.
4. *Accommodators* – are the doers, who, in the practical world, will allow necessity to dictate the invention (Kolb, 1984).

The diagram in Figure 7 indicates how each of the four categories incorporates the physical aspects of learning represented by the corresponding activities of feeling, watching, thinking and doing.

When categorising the learning styles of the Turkish students in their study in a blended learning environment, Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz-Soylu (2008), identified them as representatives of only two of Kolb's groups: the Assimilators and Divergers. Both groups participated almost equally in the face-to-face component of the course, although the Divergers participated significantly less in the online portion of the course. However, each group's satisfaction with the course differed. The mean satisfaction score dropped from 9.49 to 7.24 for the Divergers, with a two per cent overall drop in achievement scores for those in this group compared to the Assimilators.

The practical reality of this suggestion is that it does not equate to the massive popularity of social media. Today, millions of the most social people in modern-day societies gravitate to the online mediums such as Twitter, Facebook and the other 347 social networking sites listed on Wikipedia (wikipedia.org, 2017). This would suggest that students from the Divergers group would be the most receptive to the online medium. The literature suggests, however, that it is the manner in which the individual student prefers to work and learn – communally or independently – which is a key factor in the use of an LMS, and by consequence, the acceptance of blended learning (Battye & Carter, 2009; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Hara & Kling, 1999; Hunt, et al., 2002; Ng & Tsoi, 2008; Unal & Inan, 2010). As was discovered in conducting the focus groups associated with this study, sometimes participants in the social-networking areas are not even aware that they are "online", as such; this socialising was far removed from their perceptions of being online or of learning strategies. The implication of these suggestions is that due consideration needs to be given to the degree of "community" in which the student is most comfortable, or sees as a necessity, for their academic survival before a blended-learning mode of delivery is introduced (Battye & Carter, 2009; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Hara & Kling, 1999; Hunt et al., 2002; Unal & Inan, 2010). The Turkish and New Zealand studies supported this notion.

Kolb and Joy (2009) claim that members of specified race groups, particularly from Asian regions, as a generalisation do have tendencies towards Divergers-preferred learning styles. They state that "Culture has a significant effect in deciding a person's preference for Abstract Conceptualization vs. Concrete Experience" (Joy & Kolb, 2009, p. 83). This concept is not new; as early as 1966, Kaplan (1966) considered Asian conceptualisation processes were different. He called this "the theory of contrastive rhetoric" (Kaplan, 1966, p. 12). Kaplan's finding was supported by Barron and Arcodia (2002) in terms of learning-style differences. However, Barron and Arcodia (2002) also suggest that the students they classify as from a Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) will change their normative learning style to one which is compatible with the teaching method. This is consistent with studies that suggest learning styles can be altered by students to suit their current circumstances, and it has become a widely accepted theory (Biggs, 1999; Honey & Mumford, 1982; Joy & Kolb, 2009; Kolb, 1984; Volet & Renshaw, 1999; Volet, Renshaw, & Tietzel, 1994). Barron and Arcodia's (2002) study suggests that when students change their learning style, it is neither their preference nor desire to change but is simply a strategy to succeed. This suggestion was supported later by Kolb and Joy (2009).

Baker, Perkins, and Darren (2014) expand on the theory and note that learning styles can have a profound effect on the way international students react or act upon feedback received for their work. In an online environment where such miscommunication may easily be exasperated. Kumar (2000), supporting the general consensus, advocates that it is possible for an individual to be flexible and adapt to new learning styles and ideas if the social context is supportive.

No consideration is made in this literature for gender, age, race, or a myriad of other considerations, that should be taken into account when looking at the typical uses of online education. The considerations made are purely academic and relate to course design for disciplines. Battye and Carter (2009) have recognised that the general assumption that every member of the Net Generation is tech savvy is somewhat exaggerated. This is consistent with the preposition that there are people who just do not prefer to work online.

**2.4.1 Summary.** While the advent of social media has made communication very easy and accessible, this is not evidence that users know any more than the very basics, a proposition which is supported by my own research (see focus group discussions Para 6.3) and others in the field (Backer, 2010; Levy. J., 2005; Zimic, 2009). The notion of a tech savvy, digital native, net generation is a little exaggerated. Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz-Soylu (2008) suggest that students with a tendency towards a specific learning style – that of Divergers – will be less receptive to online learning (Kolb, 1984).

Kolb and Joy (2009) also suggest that there is a leaning towards the Divergers group within Asian culture. However, learning styles are not set in stone and students will adopt certain learning styles when necessary even if they are contrary to the pre-learned teaching style for the respective international students (Barron & Arcodia, 2002; Biggs, 1999; Honey & Mumford, 1982; Kolb, 1984; Unal & Inan, 2010; Volet & Renshaw, 1999; Volet et al., 1994). In a learning context, students will bring to a program a learning style that has been previously effective for them in achieving their desired goal, whether that was to learn a topic in great depth or to gain a passing grade. For example, if a student feels that they have learnt best by falling asleep in a class, they will bring that style to the new program. However, that does not mean that that particular learning style is suitable for the new program. Sleeping in class is not practical if class participation is required in a swimming pool. Thus, a student may adapt their preferred style of learning according to the task to be achieved, and more often than not, to the assessment requirements (Honey & Mumford, 1982). This observation, combined with the rising number of people using social media sites, suggests that an identified learning style is less of a barrier to online learning than the student's actual subjective perception (Ng & Tsoi, 2008; Unal & Inan, 2010), whether that perception is a reduction in satisfaction, as in Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz-Soylu (2008) study, or the perception is that it is not important, as in Skelton's study (2009).

The question raised previously – did factors exist in the cohort of students identified in the thesis study that suggest a socio-educational background which may inhibit the use of electronic media in education – has not been addressed by the application of learning style inventories. However, perception plays a major role in how students accept online learning and how they will react to it (Baker et al., 2014). That perception, and any associated reaction may be from a cultural, not ethnic, perspective.

## 2.5 Fields, Habitus, Cultural Capital and Symbolic Violence

The point has now been reached where it should be seriously considered that it is the student's perceptions of online material which will determine the material's acceptance. That perception may be coloured by frustration, isolation, time management, learning styles or culture to name a few possibilities.

This section of the literature review was written sometime after the original review. It will detail what caused the rejection of the online assessment to the consequences of that rejection. It will demonstrate that where a course or unit is augmented by electronic resources, the implementation of these resources must provide a perceived added value to the participants or they will protest. The form of protest may be symbolic or actual (Bourdieu, 1990).

This part of the review corresponds with my eventual realisation of students creating allegiance groups (associations in Bourdieusian terms (Bourdieu, 1995)) that will support their ultimate goals. As has been discussed in the previous section, the ethnicity of a student does not determine a learning style and thus resistance to electronic augmented education. This section demonstrates, from a review of the academic material, that it is the dominant hegemony of any given field which will determine acceptance of that education (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977a; Joy & Kolb, 2009).

Bourdieu was a prolific author with some 20 books and 200 articles to his credit. His writing style was, to say the least, difficult. The terminology he used, such as symbolic violence, has, as often happens, taken on a new meaning in today's context of videoed assassinations and executions. His theories are deliberately difficult to categorise or place neatly within a school of thought, such as post-colonialism or post-modernism. Indeed it was Bourdieu (1990) himself who found it difficult to categorise his work and opted instead for a theory named the *logic of practice*. I have personally found that Bourdieu's work tended to create academic polarisations, with one of my previous supervisors refusing to continue unless I dropped Bourdieu's theories in favour of other post-modernist theorists such as Baudrillard, Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault.

I personally am in the camp which believe Bourdieu's socio-political theory does not have a Eurocentric origin (Bilgin, 2016; Buchholz, 2016; Go, 2013). It is essential a theory based on class. It is a theory that people, as actors or agents, interact with the world in incredibly complex but defined ways. Their individual origins will to some greater or lesser extent determine that interaction. Within the global arena, there are individual spheres of influence that Bourdieu terms *field*s – for example, the field of politics, the field of law. Bourdieu's work in the education arena, though, had significant relevance to the study that is the subject of this thesis. Broadly speaking, Bourdieu sees symbolic structures of education systems which interact with both the individual (micro) and the global (macro) environments. How an individual reacts to the forces of power exerted on them within a given environment will depend on a "multiplicity of relations" (Everett, 2002, p57), and the individual's degree of removal from necessity. The main concepts of Bourdieu's theory of fields are *capital*, *habitus*, *doxa* and *symbolic violence*. (Everett, 2002)

### 2.5.1 Field.

Fields are the environments in which individuals, whom Bourdieu calls agents, interact. Bourdieu claims that to exist, one needs to exist in relation to others socially. Individuals mark their existence by calculating the differences between themselves and other observed objective phenomena. Bourdieu describes the interaction between individuals in a society as developing into spheres of specialisation. He calls these spheres *fields*. At a macro level, they may be the field of

> education or the field of medicine. The fields also work at a micro level, such as within an institution or an organisation. Within these fields, individuals are seemingly free agents and can move autonomously within the rules and confines of the field (Barker, 2005).

This is where a good deal of confusion arises over Bourdieu's theory. I remember being accosted at a conference once where a group of academics claimed that Bourdieu's theory could not be applied to a situation as it relies on agency. They claimed the agent is merely the catalyst. This is confusing terminology. Bourdieu use the term "agent" as one would do in France, not in the legal sense that the English common-law system would use. An agent in Bourdieu's terminology is a free agent, something that is only restricted by its parameters as in a player in a game or a free radical in a bloodstream. This is opposed to the concept that Australians are more familiar with, which is the legal concept of agents, who are not free and can only operate within the strict confinement of instructions from a principal. To rephrase this, Bourdieu's agents can do anything except that which is expressly forbidden; the English agent can only act exactly as instructed to do so. Thus, Bourdieu sees people as not being totally free, but bound by the sum of who they are. People can only make decisions about the future within that construct and the options they believe the world has given them. Thus, they are agents to the sum of their own knowledge and experience, as Bourdieu (1990a) says:

> In fact, a given agent's practical relation to the future, which governs his present practice, is defined in the relationship between on the one hand, his Habitus with its temporal structures and dispositions towards the future, consisted in the course of a particular relationship to a particular universe of probabilities, and on the other hand a certain state of chances objectively offered to him by the social world. The relation to what is possible is a relation to power; and the sense of the probable future is constituted in the prolonged relationship with a world structured according to the categories of the possible (for us) and the impossible (for us), of what is appropriate in advance by and for others and what one can reasonably expect for oneself. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 64)

The power within the field may be derived as Bourdieu has suggested from historical and ancestral years of survival in a given environment, which has shown individuals how to live. They create rules, which become laws. Bourdieu (1986; 1990; 1990b, 1993a; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977a) argues that this is not a theoretical perspective but a condition which has arisen through continual practices. In his work, the *Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu (1986) suggests that this creates an inherent law, or natural law, or *lex insita*, as he terms it: "[L]ex insita, inscribed in bodies by identical histories, which is the precondition not only for the co-ordination of practices but also for practices of co-ordination" (p. 57).

Sometimes these laws are considered in terms of *taboos*. Things that individuals are taught, or have discovered, or are afraid they should not do for fear of some disastrous consequence that will befall them. From my own experiences, I have witnessed this in Australia's Indigenous communities. Aboriginal inhabitants of the Tiwi Islands are, or at least were, a nation. This nation is divided into skin groups named Warntarringuwi (Sun), Miyartuwi (Pandanus), Mantomapila (Rock), and Takaringuwin (Mullet). The laws of the Dreaming (Aboriginal belief, religion and laws) are very strict in relation to marriage within and across skin groups in order to prevent inbreeding within such small and close-knit communities.

Bourdieu suggests that in order to appreciate how humans behave, it is necessary to understand how power affects and interacts with individuals in fields and how the different fields interact and intersect. Bourdieu (1995) defines a field as:

> … a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions that they will take with respect to the field, these position taken being aimed at either preserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces which is constituent of the field. (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 29)

Many academics, including Bourdieu, draw comparisons between fields and participating in a game (Bourdieu, 1993c; Everett, 2002; Everett & Jamal, 2004; Hawkes. L., 2014; Wacquant, 2004). In Figure 8, Hawkes (2014) depicts the field as a soccer pitch. The players, or agents, all have positions that have particular tasks – for example, goalkeeper, striker and defender. The positions that the players occupy on the field will be determined by their *habitus* (explained in the next section). Based on their positions, the players will take specific courses of action. The players' (agents') actions will be to some extent determined by the constituent elements of their habitus and how this relates to the actions of the other players.

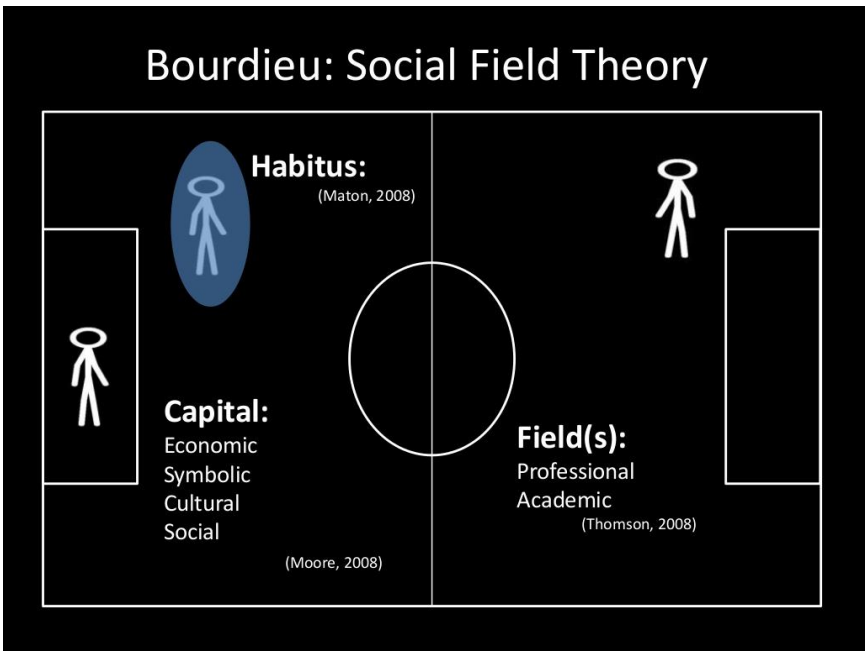



*Figure 8.* Bourdieu's social field theory. From *Understanding Cross-Cultural Adjustment and Acculturation Theories* (slide 16 from a PowerPoint presentation), by L. Hawkes, (2014), London, UK. Available: http://www.slideshare.net/harrisonmike/understanding-cross-cultural-adjustment-and-acculturation-theories-natecla

Another influence on the players will be *doxa*. Bourdieu defines doxa as a society within which "… the established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary, that is, as one possible order amongst others, but as a self-evident and natural order" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 166). Everett (2002) simplifies this by transposing the term common sense for doxa (Everett, 2002, p. 66). In reality, doxa is more closely aligned to the rules of the game. Bourdieu's definition shows that there is order, which is not arbitrary. The order is defined and stated as a *lex insita*, an inherent law. Therefore, the laws or rules will determine the actions of the players – for example, in soccer only the goalkeeper may touch the ball with their hands. That rule determines how the other players react to the ball. All the players on (in) the field will play by the same rules. When one does not, then conflict arises. Bourdieu (1977) realises that some agents will tend to not play by the rules. These agents will attempt to turn the rules or the game to their own advantage by their "… position taken being aimed at either preserving or *transforming the structure of relations of forces* which is constituent of the field" (Bourdieu, 1977, p177). When such a conflict occurs, the players will use

whatever *capital* they have (capital is discussed in the next section) to either transform the rules to their advantage or retain the status quo.

Just as the soccer field is a microcosm within the wider environment of the town, city, and ultimately the state, Bourdieu's field is a microcosm of the global community. Thus, there is the global field that contains the academic field. This, in turn, contains the Australian academic fields and, like a set of wooden Russian dolls, each field contains a smaller one until the environment is reached of the individual, which is their habitus.

Croft-Piggin (2015) suggest that the fields do not operate in isolation and that there is a noted cross-field effect.

Bourdieu has described the strategies that particular agents make in attempting to break into a field of which they are an outsider (Bourdieu, 1984) or of the pressures that particular fields exerted on others (Wacquant, 1998) and the way that this pressure distorts or alters other fields. Rawolle (2005) notes, "particular fields, though separable, in practice periodically interact with the stakes and practices of other fields" (p. 722). Croft-Piggin proposes the interaction may be usefully referred to as a "cross-field effect."

> Cross-field effects result from the inter-relations between different fields…[I]n the sense that they are not usually in contest between social fields, these connections do not usually figure as relevant to the descriptions of the particular social field. I argue that these usually uncontested connections, in the form of taken for granted assumptions about the role and function of field-based practices, are increasingly becoming the source of contest. (Rawolle 2005, p. 714)

Croft-Piggin further add,

> By shifting the spotlight from a field taken alone and focusing it on the competition and symbiosis structured between fields, Lingard and Rawolle (2004) are able to observe interdependence among some fields… Wacquant (1998) emphasizes the tensions that exist within a field, while Rawolle (2005) and Lingard, Taylor and Rawolle (2005) illustrate the pressures exerted from the outside through the presence of other fields. …The tensions between active agents from varied life experiences competing for valued capital within a field, combined with the pressures from other fields and agents outside the field, provide the opportunities for fractures of transformation to occur (Wacquant, 1998). It is a concept that allows us to move beyond the confines of a single field. (Croft-Piggin, 2015, p 116)

### 2.5.2 Habitus.

Habitus is embodied or deposited within the individual (Everett, 2002, p. 65). Bourdieu (1990a) explains that:

> [T]he conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce Habitus, systems of durable, transportable dispositions, structured structures predisposition to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53)

Just like the field in which it operates, habitus is not static. Mesinhelder (1997) explains that this is because habitus is a combination of the individual's deeply ingrained identity (conditionings) and their less fixed occupational identity. Habitus is always in a state of flux as a result of constantly being subjected to changing experiences and powers in the field. A great deal of these influences are

reinforcing, but many are also transforming and modifying (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Struggles over and in relation to the various forms of capital also have a profound effect on habitus. When an individual changes fields (for example, from an Asian education field to an Australian education field), then the habitus must change or adapt to that field (see Figure 9). Failure to change will create power struggles as explained with the soccer field analogy.

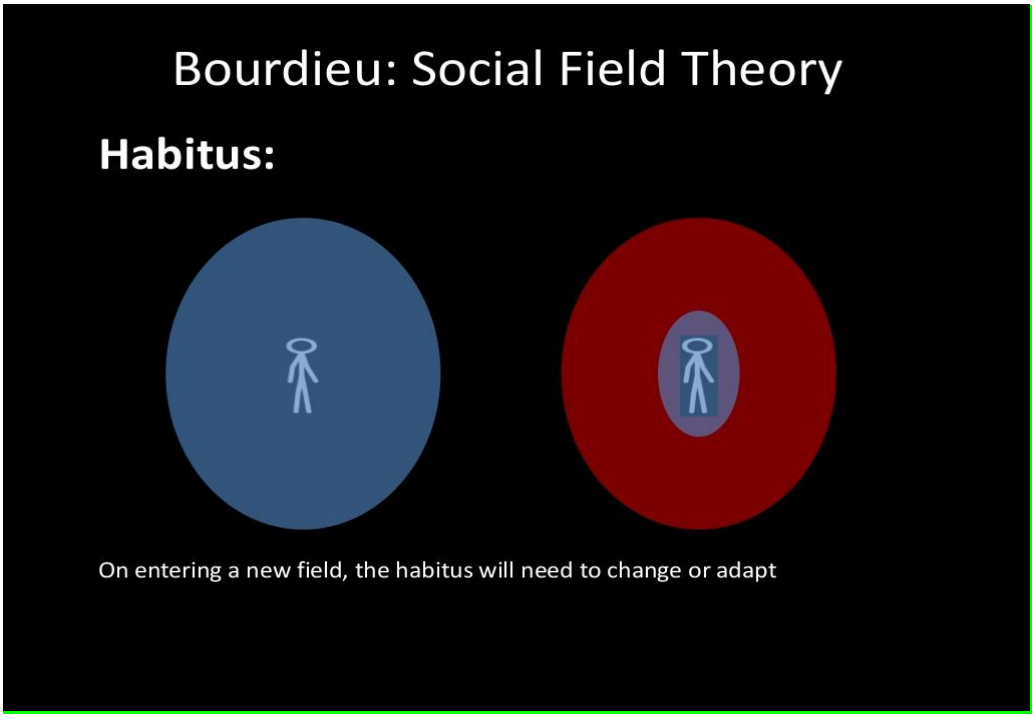



*Figure 9.* Bourdieu social field theory. From *Understanding Cross-Cultural Adjustment and Acculturation Theories* (slide 16 from a PowerPoint presentation), by L. Hawkes, 2014, London, UK. Available: http://www.slideshare.net/harrisonmike/understanding-cross-cultural-adjustment-and-acculturation-theories-natecla

Reay, Miriam, Ball, Ball, and Sterling (2005) in their book *Degrees of Choice* suggest that "Habitus is central to Bourdieu's methodology of structuralist constructivism, an attempt to transcend dualisms of agency structure and objective structure. Habitus is the tool he uses to reconcile these dualisms" (Reay, Miriam, Ball, Ball, & Sterling, 2005, p23). Reay et al. (2005) explain this conflict in Bourdieu's theory between the structure of the fields and agency. Agency or (practice) is linked with capital. It is here that Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus to keep the structure and practice in tension. He argues that habitus becomes active in relation to a field, and the same habitus can lead to different practices and stances dependent on the state of the field. Bourdieu (1993) sees habitus as generating a wide repertoire of possible actions simultaneously both transformative and constraining:

> Habitus is a kind of transformative machine that leads us to reproduce the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way. In such a way, that one cannot move simply and mechanically from knowledge of the conditions of production to knowledge of the products. (Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 87)

However, habitus predisposes individuals to certain ways of behaviour (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 77-78). Individuals work on earlier life experiences so accept exclusions, and only a limited range of practices are possible (Reay et al., 2005, p. 23). When habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar,

however, the resulting disjuncture can generate change and transformation, but also disquiet ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty. Normally, habitus operates at an unconscious level, but when someone with a strong habitus is found in a different field, then the habitus becomes a conscious level, develops self-questions in, and develops new facets of the self (Reay, 2004, pp. 23-24). Placing this scenario in the situation where Newgarth University, as the parent university, created an uncontrolled and unfamiliar field in relation to the ICT (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Thomas, 2002), the concept of habitus of the students, and indeed the institutions (Thomas, 2002), demonstrates that a piecemeal rollout strategy may be detrimental to both a university and the students. As Thomas (2002, p. 431) explains:

> Educational institutions are able to determine what values; language and knowledge are regarded as legitimate, and therefore ascribe success and award qualifications on this basis. Consequently, pedagogy is not an instrument of teaching, so much as of socialization and reinforcing status. This process ensures that the values of the dominant class has perpetuated and individuals who are inculcated in the dominant culture are the most likely to succeed, while other students are penalized. (Thomas, 2002, p. 431)

Thomas (2002) interprets Bourdieu's work on habitus "to refer to the norms and practices of particular social classes or groups" (Thomas, 2002, p. 430). Robbins (1993) further explains that where there is a dominant class or culture, which may be as seemingly insignificant as the difference between the location of students at a parent university and a partner institution, the off-campus students will be at an unfair disadvantage, and that there will be a subconscious, or possibly deliberate, "conspiratorial collusion" (Robbins, 1993, p. 153) between the on-campus staff and students "which meant that these students receive a structurally preferential treatment" (Robbins, 1993, p. 153).

Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977b) notion of habitus has at its origins two central themes, the first that the class or group to maintain its position must reproduce itself. The second is that of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; 1990; 1990b; Bourdieu, 1993b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977b). Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1986; 1990; 1990b; Bourdieu, 1993b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977b) concept of cultural capital, rather than being a system of strict definitions, is a concept that is adaptable and polymorphic. Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1986; 1990; 1990b; Bourdieu, 1993b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977b) argument is that all goods have a capital value, even the ways people have been brought up, which means that what values the group places on educational career opportunities has a value to others. How people live and learn manifests in people as cultural capital. This cultural capital can be changed, invested, and even spent in a form of value. According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986; 1990; 1990b; Bourdieu, 1993b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977b), the cultural capital which can be gained from the investment in time in a university degree, for example, can be transformed into economic capital in the form of increased income from employment, which is an argument that has been taken up by a number of scholars in the field (Ball, 1990; Green, Wolf, & Leney, 1999; Harker, 1990; Robbins, 1993; Thomas, 2002). In the situation of the students in this study both the cultural and economic capital was the required points for Permanent residency. The cultural capital being that required within the education system to gain qualification and the economic value of this was the opportunity to remain and work in Australia.

### 2.5.3 Capital.

Bourdieu's theories are not just confined to application in the French educational system. In 2010, the Australian Learning and Teaching Council awarded a grant of $220,000 to Deakin University to provide advice to other universities on how to successfully teach, and more importantly retain, students from diverse and less privileged backgrounds (Trounson, 2010). The need to award the grant

demonstrated that while the university reforms in Australia enabled anyone to attend university, the lack of cultural capital for many students simply made their withdrawals a fait accompli.

When we think of capital in our modern-day society, we normally associate the term with either money or moneys worth, such as capital in the family home. Bourdieu sees this as a very narrow concept of capital. Bourdieu sees that everything we are and do is a form of capital. Thus, Bourdieu sees capital in our culture, in our language, in our social setting in our emotions, and even as a symbolic capital. However, in order to utilise this capital there must be an investment in this capital of a kind that will result in a return on that investment. This investment is seen as a transformative process.

Bourdieu suggests that the notion of cultural capital came to him during research, as a way of explaining different scholastic achievements in children who originate from different social classes (Bourdieu, 1986). For Bourdieu, one has to disregard the traditional starting point that academic success or failure is due wholly to natural aptitude such as intelligence and giftedness, and, instead, see that academic achievement is due to the continual transmission and accumulation of cultural capital with its ways that perpetuate social inequalities.

Bourdieu (1986) criticises proponents of pure economic theory citing that in valuing only the resulting educational qualifications and outcomes, they tend to overlook that the relationship between academic ability and academic investment is based upon the time invested in obtaining cultural capital. School success is only achieved by the amount and type of cultural capital inherited from the family milieu rather than by measures of individual talent or achievement (Burke, 2017). For Bourdieu, ability is socially constructed and is the result of individuals being immersed in a field where the components of cultural capital are naturally available and transmitted even to the point of being unconsciously obtained. Cultural capital encompasses a broad array of linguistic competencies, manners, preferences, and orientations, which Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977b, p 82) terms "subtle modalities in the relationship to culture and language" (p. 82). Bourdieu, in the *Forms of Capital* (1986) suggests that cultural capital may exist in three forms:

- First, in the embodied state – that is, in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body.
- Second, in the objectified state – that is, simply existing as cultural goods such as books, artefacts, dictionaries, and paintings.
- Third, in the institutionalised state – that is, in institutionalised forms such as educational qualifications.

Interestingly, Bourdieu also states that all the forms of capital (social, symbolic, cultural, emotional) (Reay, David, & Ball, 2001) can be derived from economic capital but "only at the cost of a more or less great effort of transformation" (Bourdieu, 1986, unpaginated). This effort is required to produce the sort of power necessary in the given field to produce the transformation. This power may take place over a period of time as a natural evolution of a dominant discourse or possibly even as an economic debt or a debt of gratitude. Bourdieu accepts that the root of all capital is economic, but that economic capital cannot exist in a vacuum. Logically, for economic capital to function, it must be able to be transmuted and comply with natural laws governing that transmutation. To understand

these laws, Bourdieu claims that researchers cannot look solely at the economic or social theories but only by application of a hybrid methodology (Bourdieu, 1986).

Habitus, according to Bourdieu (1986), is the attributing of an individual's cultural capital as a precondition of that individual accepting or rejecting higher education. For Bourdieu (1977, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977b), cultural capital is learnt in the family context in similar fashion as language, manners, and values are learned. Bourdieu (1986) sees cultural capital as a social construction, represented as the accumulation of the cultural capital that is inherited or learnt from within a family context, plus the time spent using that cultural capital, where the influence of the dominant family culture will be reproduced in the children. Under such a regime, farmers will produce farmers, doctors will produce doctors or other professionals, and manual workers will produce manual workers.

Bourdieu (1986) does point out that the die is not necessarily cast, though most, according to Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977b), will fall within the cultural reproduction cycle. An individual's (such as a student) cultural reproduction cycle will determine ways in which they will view education and use the knowledge gained from that education to create more cultural capital (Burke, 2017). Bourdieu (1986) suggests that this theory of cultural capital is not compatible with other theories, preferring instead to isolate his ideas in what he describes as the *logic of practice*. The logic of practice (Bourdieu, 1990) requires that recognition be given to accumulated cultural heritage. Bourdieu (1986) recognises in the *Forms of Capital* that there is a discursive field which relates to power within traditional cultural practices. These practices are also linked through that power to an economy.

On this basis, discourses of habitus may be seen as discourses of power (Foucault, 1977, 1990). Taking up the idea that habitus is an inherent law, which owes its existence to that of customary repeated history, it may indeed be argued, as Bourdieu (1986; 1990; 1990b; 1993b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977b) does, that history reproduces itself repeatedly. But this reproduction occurs only through the interactivity of the discipline implemented through the mobilisation of privileged discourses. To demonstrate this, Bourdieu has drawn upon lex insita, which is "the intentions of men who have formulated the meanings, which, voluntary or unknowingly, they have deposited within them" (Foucault, 1977, p. 14).

Bourdieu (1986, 1990b) also considers ability as a social construction. Along with cultural capital, ability is indoctrinated into the recipient within the context of the family environment. To Bourdieu, it is not only the immediate family that creates this influence, but it is also the culmination of tradition and learnt experience. To Bourdieu (1986; 1990; 1990b; 1993b), it is the lifestyle of the Algerian tribes, whose centuries of existence have shown them how to invest what little they have. To ensure survival, they have developed a lifestyle of economic and environmental sustainability. That accumulation of cultural capital creates a cycle of the dominant family culture. It creates a living space for the family, which will be mirrored by the members of that family. The cycle of the family's culture will be reproduced in the offspring. Ability is acquired by repetition in learning how to achieve a task (Bourdieu, 1990b; 1993b) Ability is required for investment of cultural capital. With no other ability than that learnt in the cycle, there are no new methods of investment, and the cycle will repeat itself. There will always be exceptions to the rule, and Bourdieu (1986) does stress that the rules for dealing with cultural capital may be learnt, arguing that it is actually in the interests of the institutional power that some do break free from the cycle. This produces an appearance of equality, of a person rising through the ranks of discipline upon the merit of accepting the normalisation required by that discipline (Foucault, 1977).

For Bourdieu, establishing equity is not just a matter of taking the lower classes and providing access to academia. The lower classes have not been inculcated with the culture that enables them to invest wisely the capital they have. Providing access to academia for unprepared students creates a situation where one is inviting those students to fail. Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1993c) likens the situation to a game of roulette. In this scenario, the ways in which a person might play the game will depend on the number of chips they will take to the table. People with more chips will tend to bet larger. When they win, the prize is much greater (Bourdieu, 1993c). In a similar fashion, those with more cultural capital will invest more in academia knowing that the rewards are greater. Those with fewer chips will not bet as freely. They will not invest their time in academia and will tend towards more instant monetary rewards. Even when admitted to academia, those with less cultural capital will invest less time and develop less ability (P. Bourdieu, 1986, 1993c).

Bourdieu (1986; 1977b) attributes an individual's cultural capital as a precondition in relation to whether that individual would accept or reject higher education. Mahar, Harker, and Wilkes (Harker, 1990) have also taken up this argument. Bourdieu (1986) suggests that in order to change cultural capital, it is necessary to teach (or learn) the skills needed to take the cultural capital that is already possessed and invest it wisely – for example, not necessarily what to learn but, in the first instance, how to learn. Bourdieu (1986) suggests that the social and cultural context of the students informs their learning style and ultimately the resources they will be prepared to use in learning. As with Kolb's (1984) learning style inventories, the students' learning style will change when introduced to a new field, and if the need arises, a new habitus will be created (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990b, 1993c). However, unlike Kolb (1984), who suggests that a student will change styles in a "sink or swim" scenario, Bourdieu suggest that if there is conflict between the new field and the students' habitus, this may result in symbolic violence being exerted upon the student resulting in transformation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The student will either accept and become complicit or resist. Where there is a fracture in the field due to the conflicting powers of the cross field effect active agents can accomplish change (Bourdieu, 2002) .

#### 2.5.4 Doxa and symbolic violence.

Everett (2002) rephrases Bourdieu's term *doxa* into common sense (2002, p. 66). Bourdieu (1977) describes a doxic society as "the established cosmological and political order is preserved not as arbitrary, that is, as one possible order amongst others, but as a self-evident and natural order" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 166). What Bourdieu describes is a society which has its laws and rules inscribed in a manner which prevents them from arbitrary application. Such is the theory of the *rule of law* (Dicey, 1982, p. 173).

Such societies are always in a state of flux as legitimacy is constantly challenged and one order strives for the dominant discourse over the others. Bourdieu (1977) continues claiming that "what is essential goes without saying because it becomes without saying: the tradition is silent, not least about itself as tradition"(Bourdieu, 1977, p. 167). Thus, each discourse defends the doxa of the order, the common sense and tradition that the order is built on, whether that order is the sovereign state of a country, or the time-honoured traditions in the microcosm of a university and its education system.

Everett (2002) suggests that "where doxa or common sense produces an unequal distribution of personal capital and a legitimisation of such production we find 'symbolic violence'" (Everett, 2002, p. 66). Bourdieu suggest that symbolic violence can do what political and police violence can do; only it does it more efficiently (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). There has been much written on the use of symbolic violence in different areas of study in recent years. Symbolic violence in E-learning supported tertiary education (Johnson, MacDonald, & Brabazon, 2008): symbolic

violence in public sector accounting against Intellectual capital (Dumay & Rooney, 2018): symbolic violence in call centres (Brannan, 2015): the appearance of symbolic violence in the Turkish education system (Ergin, Rankin, & Gökşen, 2018): the use of symbolic violence against ethnic minorities in Nepal (Khanal, 2017): symbolic violence at the intersection of race and class in black student behaving badly in a school room (Gast, 2018): the use of a positive symbolic violence by creating tolerance zones for Mexican sex workers (Pintin-Perez, Rojas Wiesner, & Bhuyan, 2018): symbolic violence against adult European students (Nairz-Wirth, Feldmann, & Spiegl, 2017): symbolic violence in predatory academic publishing (Ebadi & Zamani, 2018): symbolic violence demonstrated by ability grouping primary school children (McGillicuddy & Devine, 2018). Everett (2002), in an article looking at the management structure of a national park in Canada, noted that symbolic violence was exerted through the order of things, through the application of the logic of practice, and through complicity. He suggests that those who are symbolically dominated conspire and commit isolated treasons against themselves (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Everett, 2002, p. 66). Everett (2004) explains how symbolic violence appears in education:

> One such arena in which Bourdieu sees symbolic violence commonly being carried out is the education system, a system where in those who form the lowest income backgrounds typically fail to do well not because of some "natural" inability but because of their belief in some natural inability. Such students are convinced that they are lesser because they are under the illusion that the education system is open, equitable and fair. They do not consider that their failure might be because they lack the proper linguistic capital, a form of capital that is inherited. Their exclusion based on their objective assessment of their chances at success in the scholastic market, is an act of complicity, of symbolic violence. (Everett, 2002, p. 66)

As Thomas (2002, p. 431) explains:

> Educational institutions are able to determine what values; language and knowledge are regarded as legitimate, and therefore ascribe success and award qualifications on this basis. Consequently, pedagogy is not an instrument of teaching, so much as of socialization and reinforcing status. This process ensures that the values of the dominant class has perpetuated and individuals who are inculcated in the dominant culture are the most likely to succeed, while other students are penalized. (Thomas, 2002, p. 431)

Thus, the educational institution enforces dominant cultural values. The institution is structured in such a way as to suit those who adhere to these cultural values or conform to dominant social group. These cultural values may range from the language used within the teaching space to the physical design of that same space. The subjects taught, and the presentation of those subjects also contribute to dominant cultural values (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In academia one must research, even at an undergraduate essay level, and that research must fulfil the academic requirements which are based on reason, logic, evidence, and persuasion. Once adhered to, the participant will gain symbolic capital in the form of academic recognition; which in turn will allow the participant to progress in the field as the institution is reinforcing their cultural norms within the field. Symbolic violence in the forms of barriers to success or completion and progression will be bought to bear on those who do not comply. The result of symbolic violence on students with a non-compatible habitus is that they will not be able to *play the game* and, therefore, not excel to the level of their class counterparts. Sadly, often these students will believe/understand that they have certain limitations, demonstrated by the educational system, and will, therefore, have limited aspirations and expectations. I personally have observed and experienced this phenomenon in remote indigenous communities of Australia. There the students do not have the cultural values, nor

conform to the dominant ideals, of the educational institution. The lack of linguistic capital of the students makes study extremely hard work, much harder than for those whose habitus is grounded in the dominant culture and language. It is the subjective perception of the extra work required to perform in the dominate language that creates the belief in a natural inability. In the case of indigenous students from remote Australian communities, it is the entering of a new field that creates the conflict and invokes the symbolic violence against the student to which they are complicit in. This idea of complicity and symbolic violence are at the very heart of Bourdieu's conception of power (Everett, 2002). In my observations of remote Australia, the perpetration of symbolic violence results in abandonment of study or a passive resistance in the form of poor grades and bad behaviour in class.

The difficulties of symbolic violence, however, do not end here. In the book *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) Bourdieu states that Virginia Woolf in *To the Lighthouse*, was extremely perceptive when she notes that there is "a paradoxical dimension of symbolic domination, and one overlooked by feminist critique, namely the domination of the dominant by his domination: a female gaze upon the desperate and somewhat pathetic effort that any man must make, in his triumphant unconsciousness, to try to live up to the dominant idea of man." (p173). Bourdieu reflects upon this as the almost maternalistic feminine gaze, looking on from a distance at the, and I quote, "… desperate and somewhat pathetic …" efforts men will go to, to achieve the very ideals he has set for himself (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 173). Burke (2017) sees this as an inverted symbolic violence, when the high aspiration of the dominant group is not fulfilled by the participants. I suggest that Burke's example is the inability to utilise the gained cultural capital due to the habitus of the participants. Their social backgrounds denied them the ability to use the capital they had gained. An analysis of the female gaze as it relates to symbolic violence is sadly beyond this study; however, the concept of those within the dominant group still being dominated by the drive to attain ideals of that group has relevance to this study. In the academic field this may be termed as academic imperialism.

Academic imperialism was developed as a concept in the 1960s and 70s. Although the concept of academic imperialism has been circulated for some time and is seen to have been a product of colonialism, Amster (2007) and Alatas (2003) credit Johan Galtung (1971) with solidifying the term. Amster (2007) in *Knowledge, Freedom and Post-Soviet Imperialism,* provides a spectacular bibliography of the recognition of academic imperialism over the period from 1970 to 2006. From this body of work, she suggests that:

> The central hall mark of academic imperialism is not as sometimes suspected, the political motivations of colonising agents, but rather the structural and cultural inequalities which shape the kinds of discourse and volume and meaning of intellectual work that is produced in and about a particular society. These inequalities, particularly the intellectual dependence of post-colonial societies and the intellectual hegemony of dominant ones, emerge most frequently when one scientific or intellectual community becomes unable unwilling or disallowed to support itself and becomes structurally or culturally dependant on others. This is one reason why newly independent nations, particularly those in which ex-colonial power withdrew finical support for science and education have historically been vulnerable to academic imperialism. (p, 180)

It is evident that domination of the dominant by his/her domination can be applied to the theory of academic imperialism. While the theory is normally applied to the dominant western theoretical structures over the financially vulnerable third world academic settings it can equally apply where, within a given educational institution, the financial concerns controlled by the dominant, dominate those academics who work at lower levels who are less financial secure (thus financially dependent)

within the same institution, by coercing them to adopt differing academic standards or fail to secure financial payment. (Alatas, 2003)

> If in the colonial past, academic imperialism was maintained via colonial power, today academic neo-colonialism is maintained via the condition of academic dependency. The West's monopolistic control of and influence over the social sciences in much of the Third World are not determined in the first instance by force via colonial power but rather by the dependence of Third World scholars and intellectuals on western social science in a variety of ways. (Alatas, 2003, p. 602)

One of the dependencies claimed by Alatas (2003) was the dependency of Third World academics on the monetary investment made by Australian universities both in Australia and overseas. Without such investment there would be fewer teaching jobs. In the micro field of partner/parent educational institution this symbiotic economic dependency can and does dictate the cultural academic values, in extremes. It can manifest itself in a refusal to acknowledge academic ability on a racial basis. It can also be used to undermining all academic standards in consideration of financial gains.

Conversely, where there is an attempt to assert symbolic violence and the participants in the field are not complicit, then resistance will occur. That resistance where there is a fracture in the field may result in an opportunity for active agents to effect real change, especially if they can form a recognisable group with a recognisable manifesto. Bourdieu states;

> There is nothing that groups recognize and reward more unconditionally and demand more imperatively than the unconditional manifestation of respect for the group as a group…" (Bourdieu 2000, p. 125)

Bourdieu sees that any action more than grumblings and complaints become *Realpolitik.*

> If one wants to go beyond preaching, then it is necessary to implement practically, by using the ordinary means of political action—creation of associations and movements, demonstrations, manifestoes, etc.—the Realpolitik of reason aimed at setting up or reinforcing, within the political field, the mechanisms capable of imposing the sanctions, as far as possible automatic ones, that would tend to discourage deviations from the democratic norm (such as the corruption of elected representatives) and to encourage or impose the appropriate behaviours; aimed also at favouring the setting up of non-distorted social structures of communication between the holders of power and the citizens, in particularly through a constant struggle for the independence of the media. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 126)

This same resistance was observed in the students who formed the basis of this case study, when they created allegiance between themselves and organised these allegiances into a group and, en masse, refused to undertake an assessment task. Thomas (2002), in an article looking at how institutional habitus can be altered to accommodate students, demonstrates how the habitus and symbolic violence fields are inextricably linked. Thomas (2002) identifies that if students feel that their social and cultural practices are compatible with their new higher education settings, they will feel like a "fish in water; it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). Conversely, students who feel that their social and cultural practices are not accepted in the new higher education settings will be more likely to display resistance to symbolic violence and protest, in the case of indigenous Australians I observed this to manifested itself in early withdrawals, or simply giving up and failing. The international

students I observed will feel like a fish out of water and engage in resistance actions, communally as a group, in an effort to return to a familiar field or where their habitus is compatible with the dominant discourse. It is here that the theory has application to this study.

#### 2.5.5 Communal Resistance.

Bourdieu writing of what he terms as the scholastic fallacy explains that the concept of popular culture in art and aesthetics is in effect an illusion perpetuated by the members of the elite class.

> One cannot without contradiction, describe (or denounce) the inhuman conditions of existence that are imposed on some, and at the same time credit those who suffer them with the real fulfilment of human potentialities such as the capacity to adopt the gratuitous, disinterested posture that we tactically inscribe- because it is socially inscribed there- in notions of culture or Aesthetic (Bourdieu , 2000, p. 75).

In this quote it can clearly be seen that a society cannot impose strict conditions on a class of persons, then suggest that the limit of that class's potential can only be of a second-rate nature (a popular culture) as the class does not poses the notions of culture and aesthetics to progress to the full potential of human achievement. Where members of that class attempt to change the status of the class due to inhuman conditions being perpetrated against them find that "Status movements are closely linked with identity issues [in which] the grievances are actuated by perceived threats to how one defends oneself" (Larana, Johnson & Gusfield 1994, p. 23). The identity issue is converted to concepts of collective identity and is used to discuss the process through which political activists create in-group cohesion and distinguish themselves from society at large. Thus, it can be seen that in a field, the collective identity arises from the agents who identify as different to the norm or dominant culture and which see a need to protect that identity. In the situation of the Melbourne international students who protested in 2009, it can be seen that the rallies and meeting were unified demonstrations of a collective desire to have suffering recognised and political and judicial mechanisms for redress. From the placards being held (see section 4.6) and the pamphlets circulated at rallies and meeting, informal and political discussion both in the media and in the private political meeting, an explicit production and reproduction of a collective identity is established (Samuel, 2013). There are hundreds of literary writings on the use of such collective identity in communal resistance, from resistance in Northern Ireland (Sulka, 1995) to resistance of land grabbing in China (He & Xue, 2014) and from resistance to discrimination of LGBT rights in Australia (Samuel, 2013) to African soccer between 1920 and 1974 (Merrett, 2009).

## 2.6 Conclusion

The literature review has covered four different but related areas of research with regard to this project. The first examines the historical literature in relation to the recognition and use of the term ICT in education. The second area is that of students' perceptions of ICT. The third area looks at culture and different learning styles, and how these may affect students' acceptance of ICT, and the fourth looks at Bourdieu's concepts of fields, habitus and capital.

The general consensus of opinion from the literature on ICT was that it lends itself to a great deal of new opportunities in the area of education. Though this being said, the dominant voices in the call for the use of ICT tended to focus on the availability and possible uses rather than integration into current educational systems. The speeds at which the possible applications of ICT have developed over the past two decades have been nothing short of staggering. However, as was demonstrated in the longitudinal studies, student satisfaction with ICT applications has not keep pace with the speed of development. In fact, in some cases, student satisfaction decreased. The studies that were

commissioned and conducted into the rollout of ICT in various institutions all recommended that specific structures be put in place to ensure that students had both technical and pedagogical support when undertaking their studies.

The introduction of blended learning and the growth of the international student educational system in Australia saw a new focus on blended learning. This was due in part to international students being effectively prohibited from undertaking online education while residing in Australia. The confusion created by the overriding legislation saw conflict develop between universities and the quality control authorities. As a result, the implementation of blended learning in some institution was not strategically rolled out. Added to the complication is the assumption from authors such as Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) that every student is now a technological expert. Apart from being a very Eurocentric assumption, it has proved to be misleading. Modern students, as with the general population, have had to develop better and strategic time management techniques in order to cope with masses of information that one is bombarded with on a daily basis. The world now works on a 24-hour, 24-time zone basis and people constantly filter out only that information that is relevant to them. For international students, this may mean living in one culture while studying in another.

It has been suggested by Kolb (1984) that culture can be attributed to a preference in learning styles; however, a learning style that is compatible with a teaching style can be learnt even if it is not the preferred style. Bourdieu continues with this argument, bringing into play the concepts of habitus, fields and capital. For Bourdieu, culture is all that people have learnt from their individual surroundings. It is language, food, clothes, and even education styles. An Australian international student will change fields from that of the education system in their own country to the field of the Australian education system. If the student's individual habitus is compatible with the dominant power in the field, the student will adapt. If there is conflict, the student will be complicit to what is termed "symbolic violence" and adapt; or, they will look for transformation and become politically active, rebellions and dominant.

In 2009 the economic tables were turned. The students were able to utilise their dominant habitus which provided them with the cultural capital to use the symbolic power via political means to create transformation. They formed an allegiance which became a recognisable group with a manifesto for change. They exploited the fracture in the fields and forced a change to the educational institutional culture.

# *Chapter 3*

# *Method and Methodology*

> Why couldn't the world that concerns us be a fiction? And if somebody asked, "but to be a fiction there surely belongs an author?" – couldn't one answer simply: "Why? Doesn't this 'belongs' perhaps belong to the fiction, too?" (Nietzsche, 1886, Para. 34)

## 3.1 Introduction

The journey in this thesis has encountered a great many ups and downs, false starts and changes of direction. However, one constant has remained – that by necessity this narrative is written as a work of fiction. It is written in the method called *autoethnographical fiction* as coined by Carolyn Ellis (2004). The places are fictional and the actors in the narrative are composites, apart from myself and Susan my wife. Ellis when describing to one of her students why her character in the book, *the ethnographic I* was portrayed the way it was, explained.

> I have taken considerable literary licence to make the characters into the persona I need for my plot to work. I am not actually striving for complete accuracy in displaying you as you are, but I am trying to make the story lifelike; you should be able to recognise yourself. Even if what I describe didn't happen exactly as I describe it, each scene should fit within the parameters of what has happened and could happen… (Ellis, 2004, p. 251)

This idea is not new, the legendary Aesop disguised narrative ethics in fairy-tale; George Orwell's fairy-tale of the residences on *Animal Farm* thinly disguises the political group, which the pigs were shown to represent (Orwell, 1945).

For me, as a lawyer, ethicist, human rights campaigner, and teacher, the narratives/stories of the people I have encountered are the very data which drives appeals, defences, mitigations and actions. These narratives/stories are the agents of change. It is only natural and logical, then, that I should consider the main methodology of this thesis would be that of ethnography. A study to look for patterns and structures in a society based upon the stories of the individuals in that society. A chance introduction in 2013 to John Flood (2007), at a conference where he was about to give a seminar entitled *He's Fucking Marvellous: The Fall and Rise of Barristers' Clerks*, convinced me that rather than ethnography, autoethnography was the most suitable methodology to underpin the narration for this thesis.

Flood told me how, in order to gain data for his article, which the seminar was based on, he became totally immersed in the world of the barristers' clerks. A clerk's lifestyle became his; there was no separation. Flood convinced me that because I was such an integral part of my story, to write it as a disinterested third person would be artificial and misleading. Later, at the seminar connected with this work, Flood took great pains to point out that the article was based on what *he* saw and heard. The conclusions were those that *he* arrived at from *his* analysis. He was offering to the world his opinion of how this very complicated, traditional, and hierarchical segment of the legal profession functioned very efficiently, when to the outside world there was simply chaos and archaic unethical behaviour. Flood also took great pains to point out that the legal profession did not totally agree with his appraisal of the situation.

The event at the centre of this study actually occurred. It occurred during a very small window in time; a snapshot of some ten days in 2009. The original survey that was conducted to determine

what happened was never intended to be part of a PhD study. The sole purpose of the survey was to categorically prove that a problem actually existed, and that the problem applied to only one cohort of students. It was expected that any subsequent qualitative discussion would show that this specific cohort has a pre-existing disposition, of avoiding online learning. I could not have been more incorrect in this assumption. Time however was against me. Ethically, I could not survey the students that I was teaching as this would be problematical in terms of power issues. I would be in a situation of perceived influence. The survey had to be given when I had taken actions to remedy any possible influence I may have over the students. The ethics application process was far more time consuming than I had anticipated requiring negotiation with partner institutions. Urgency was thus required as the students at the centre of the study were now about to graduate. The survey that was finally given was sketched on work that other academics had done in the field. As I was only looking at a small assessment, the use of the original instrument which looked at entire courses were inappropriate. The instrument thus required modification to accommodate this much reduced focus. I had at this time thought of this survey as a pilot study for possible longitudinal research. It was only when autoethnography was adopted as the methodology for this PhD study, that the survey became part of that narrative.

To return to the whodunit allegory, I appeared to have the remains of a poor, defenceless assessment, brutally "done in" and left to expire in the midst of a great number of suspects, all of whom were in fervent denial. In all murder cases I have dealt with, both those real ones I have defended in court and the fictitious ones, the detective needs to provide evidence of the existence of motive, opportunity and ability to commit a crime. For the prosecution lawyer they must weave that evidence into a theory of the case, which narrates a story showing that the accused contemporaneously possessed the *actus reus*, (the ability to commit the act), and the *mens rea* (the guilty mind).

The issue for me, then, is where do I start to tell this story? Was it the post-mortem on the poor victim to determine the cause of death, and thus who had access to the means of destruction? Do I look for motives? This requires going back in history well beyond that of the original incident. Alternatively, do I look for who had the opportunity to cause the demise of the poor victim? At the time of commencing this thesis, I decided that the post-mortem was the place to start. After all, I did have to prove that the assessment died … and not of natural causes.

The next step was to gain as many witness statements as possible before these observers fled to regions unknown. From these meagre slivers of evidence, I hoped I could form a theory of the case, (for those budding advocates, see *Fundamentals of Trial Technique* (3rd ed.), Mauet and McCrimmon, 2011). It was here, though, that things took their first twist ... some of the survey results went missing. This could have been simple clerical apathy, but I did not think so. This was just one of a series of odd occurrences that were just too strange to be coincidence. Then enter the enigmatic stranger, in this case a student named Gitika, and these events became pieces in a story. I could see that I had to follow Flood's example and immerse myself in this world of international students.

With Flood's caveat firmly in mind that I would be presenting only one possible explanation for a series of events, I have firmly set the methodology for this thesis as autoethnographical fiction. As I, myself, am the main protagonist, I am relating to the reader that which I saw and discovered. From my observations and discoveries, I drew conclusions, which on most occasions were totally incorrect. Where in real life I was merely attempting to pragmatically resolve a pedagogical issue, in the literary form of this thesis I became aware that a mishmash of ideas and leapfrogging from event to event is not enough. I am required to guide the reader though this maze, yet rather than just rush headlong

into the labyrinth, I must lead in such a way that the reader is aware they are observing my story, they know I am aware of them, and the reader is aware of their own consciousness.

In this thesis, I have no harsher critic than myself. I want to reveal the mistakes that I made, and how almost by accident I happened upon a theory that worked. My purpose is to relate to the reader those steps and stages I encountered and ask them to draw their own conclusions as to whether my conclusions are tenable. Every reader will see this thesis through their own lens, be it feminism, legal naturalism, post-colonialism or a myriad of other "isms." As a lawyer required to teach components of a business law course, it was necessary occasionally, in order to understand the issues, to remove the legal hat and don that of the education researcher (de Bono, 1985). Though without apology, I am what I am, and the legal training in me is as strong as the force in a Jedi knight; thus, despite my best intentions, legal naturalism remained in these periods and provided a lens through which to view the research. I have, however, despite my own legal lens, attempted to present this thesis as a pragmatic treatise on teaching, with the only goal being that of preventing what occurred from happening again and thereby create a better environment for all students.

What then follows in this chapter is an explanation of why I finally chose autoethnography as the methodology for this thesis. In using this methodology, I will describe how I employed a combination of remedial actions, studies, interviews and reflections, as methods of data collection at various stages of the research. Each part of the research journey undertaken in this thesis utilised a method of data collection that was suitable for immediate needs at that particular stage of the research. The first part of the chapter looks at autoethnography and how it has been used to narrate the thesis. The second part describes the rationale for undertaking the thesis, which is then followed by an examination of paradigmatic stances that could be applied both retrospectively and concurrently to the data collection required. The final part of the chapter examines the theories, which informed the early research conducted prior to the start of this thesis, and how those theories came to be dovetailed to form a coherent theoretical position, which underpinned the final analysis via the method of analytical induction. The timeline for this section covers the period from 2007 to the end of 2010.

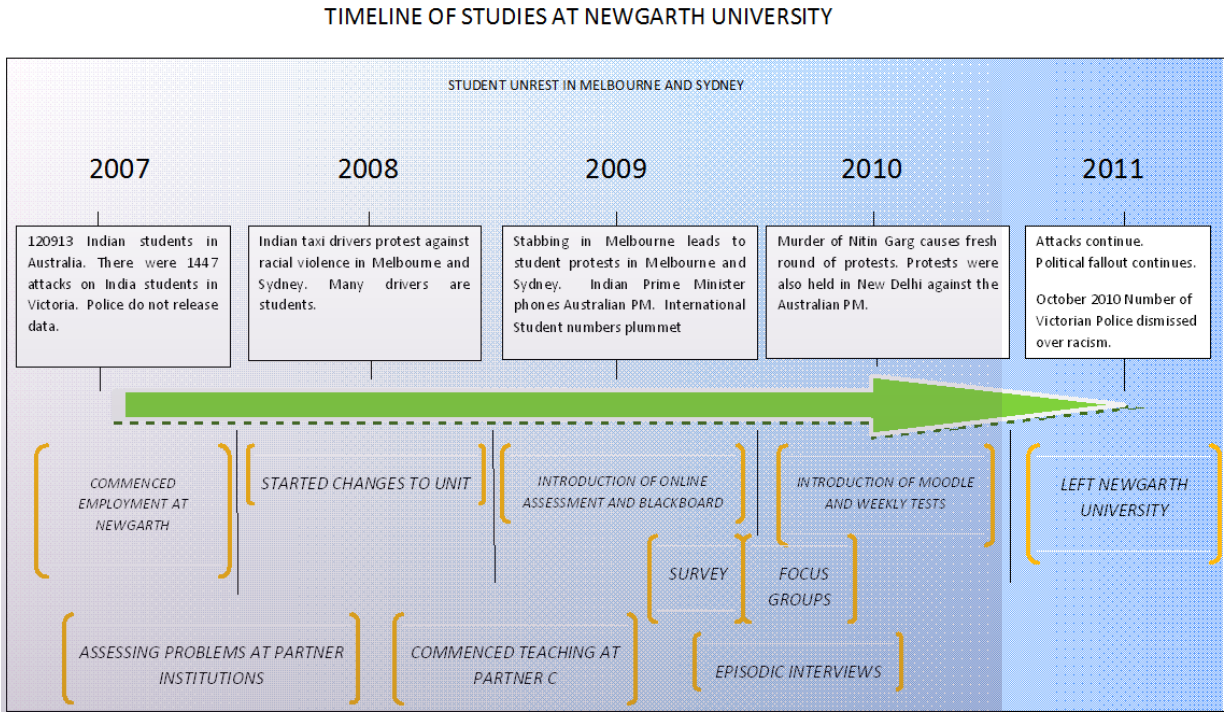



*Figure 10.* Timeline covers the period from 2007 to the end of 2010.

## 3.2 Autoethnography

> ""If you viewed your project as closer to art than science, then your goal would not be so much to portray the facts of what happened to you accurately," I continue, "but instead to convey the *meaning* you attached to the experience. You'd want to tell a story that readers could enter and feel a part of. You'd write in a way to evoke readers to feel and think about your life and their lives in relation to yours. You'd want them to experience your experience as if it were happening to them." (Ellis, 2004. P. 116)

The methodology in this study that binds all the others together is by way of a personal story written in the form of fictional autoethnographic narrative. Ethnography has been used by researchers for many years in several forms from providing descriptive portraits of people and environments to outright storytelling. In recent years, ethnography has become popular as a method whereby the structure of a given culture can be examined without revealing all the personal details of the individuals involved – a very important aspect when considering the ramifications of human ethics. Autoethnography involves the researcher exploring and examining part of their own experience within the context of the topic under research (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

> Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (Spry, 2001) and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Adams & Holman jones, 2008). A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, Para. 1).

Ellis's suggestion is that autoethnography is a socially-just form of methodology when the researcher is "implicated" in the socially-conscious context (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, Para. 29). In this study that experience is in the cultural context of international students at partner institutions.

Ellis's epic book *The Ethnographic I,* sets out the historical origins of autoethnography (Ellis, 2004). Autoethnography is defined by Reed-Danahy (1997) "as a form of self-narrative that places the self within the social context. It is both method and a text, as in the case of ethnography" (p. 9). Though the meaning of autoethnography has not remained constant. Even now the term autoethnography is still by no means fixed. Chang cited no less than 39 similar terms that describe autoethnography (Chang, 2008). However, the underlying premise of all these terms is that it is the researcher's interpretation of their lived experiences which provides the data to the analysis of the study. The researcher reflects on self-thoughts, feelings, and emotions in relation to their reactions in cultural applications of the phenomena studied (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

In all forms of ethnography, it is also necessary that certain assumptions are made. It is necessary to assume that the concept of culture exists. Culture, according to Chang must be the basis of any ethnographic study including autoethnography (Chang, 2008). Chang states that "the concept of culture is inherently group-orientated, because culture results from human interaction with each other" (Chang, 2008, p. 16). This is not restricted to racial or ethnic cultures but to those given set of rules, customs, etiquettes that exist in any given field of social activity. They may be as complicated as the Australian Aboriginal rules of social interaction within *Skin Groups*, or as simple as the accepted *norm* of city dwellers moving down inside a tram to allow other passengers to board. The norms may be there for ultimate survival or simply to facilitate a specific goal. There is a symbiotic

relationship between the individual and the community as one cannot exist without the other. De Munck stated:

> Obviously, one does not exist as a psyche – a self – outside of culture; nor does culture exist independently of its bearers… Culture would cease to exist without the individuals who make it up… Culture requires our presence as individuals. With this symbiosis, self and culture together make each other up and, in that process, make meaning. (De Munck, 2000, pp. 1-2)

Thus, writing autoethnography is the act of focusing on one's personal experiences in relationship to the larger community and cultural environment in which they interact. Carolyne Ellis 's book *The Ethnographic I* (2004) explores not only the expert ethnographer taking her class of soon to be experts, but also the times when things went wrong. The presentation at the woman's shelter when all the triggers in a performance that were there to evoke emotional responses, were also the triggers that spoke of danger and bought automatic responses from a very different audience (Ellis, 2004). It is thus important while producing thought provoking stories to evaluate how those stories will be interpreted by different audiences. Is the autoethnographer bringing new warmth to a cold and rigor mortis corpus delicti or is that warmth from the fires surrounding the stake at a public burning where the crowd witness the just punishment of a criminal (Tompkins, 1992)? The problem with making oneself vulnerable is that it may just cause you pain. The value of autoethnographic studies, however, is the use of these same personal experiences to bring light to wider cultural themes and phenomena. Bourdieu (2007) recognised these same fears when he started *Sketch for a self-analysis* with these words;

> I do not intend to indulge in the genre of autobiography, which I often enough describe as both conventional and illusory. I would simply like to try to gather together and present some elements for a self-socioanalysis. I do not conceal my apprehensions, which go far beyond the habitual fear of being misunderstood. I have indeed the feeling that, particularly on account of the scale of my path through social space and the practical incompatibility of the social worlds that it links without reconciling them, I cannot wager – being far from sure of achieving it myself with the instruments of sociology – that the reader will be able to bring to bear on the experiences that I shall be led to invoke, the gaze that, in my view, is the appropriate one. (p. 1)

Having worked with indigenous cultures that survived for thousands of years as oral histories, communicated through dance, artefacts, thoughts and feelings, transmitted through stories such as Maui's fish hook, and Goorialla the Rainbow Serpent which future generations may learn from, it is only natural that fictional autoethnography would seem such a natural choice of method. Hopefully then, this study will allow other educators to analyse how my particular experiences can be applied to others in similar situations (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010).

It is somewhat comforting, in an offbeat sort of way, to read the stories of the experiences of other ethnographic researchers and realise that the seemingly insurmountable problems I have encountered, as to access to culture and privacy issues, in my research journey are boringly ordinary, normal and commonplace (Penick, 2017). These issues plague other research to varying degrees. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) give examples of where access to a cultural group has been denied for a myriad of reasons and show that such access is usually facilitated by a sponsor. A sponsor is someone within the group who will vouch for the researcher and guide them past the gatekeepers to show how the inner sanctums of the group operate (Flood, 2007). This is often the only manner by which the researcher gains such access. In my own situation, even though I worked in the industry

(and it is an industry – students are consumers according to Australian Consumer law legislation (Competition and Consumer Act 2010), a great deal of access was denied to me both by the institutions and the students. It was only the facilitation of a young woman, who shall be named Gitika, acting as my sponsor within the student culture that enabled me to gain insights into the issues experienced by this group. Interestingly, the manner in which I was denied access to the cultures at the centre of my study created as many questions as they blocked. In some ways, this relates to the second dilemma of confidentiality.

The second dilemma of confidentiality is possibly the greatest bugbear. It is supposedly possible to write from the moral high ground as the whistle-blower. I could write an exposé, with all guns blazing, confident that I had killed off the bad guys; then sit back in retirement, as I would never work again (Burton-Bradly, 2018). The fallout from those wounded by friendly fire would also be catastrophic. People such as the students at the centre of this study had put a great deal of trust in me. Their lives and privacy had to be protected even if it meant protecting the institutions creating the problems as well. The option here was not difficult. I decided that fictionalised ethnography was the only logical method of writing (Ellis, 2004; Humphreys & Watson, 2009; Penick, 2017).

Humphreys and Watson (2009) defend "fictional ethnography" this way. While certain facts have been altered by the writer for the protection of the research subjects "…the key truths about the process – about 'how things happen' or 'how things work' – are retained" (2009, p. 42). They continue in a slightly worrying manner reminiscent of George Orwell: "There is here no concept of an ultimate or final truth. No research account can ever be totally 'true' but that some accounts are truer than others" (Humphreys & Watson, 2009, p. 42). That is not to say that this thesis is in any way untrue. It is simply a story told through my eyes with the names, dates and places changed to protect the innocent. Is this deceptive? Holdaway (1982) tells of a police officer who wanted to conduct an ethnographic study of the police force. As a serving police officer, he knew who the gatekeepers were and that his access would be seriously curtailed. He was faced with six options:

- Seek the permission of the chief officer to research, giving full details of method and intention.
- Seek permission as above, so phrasing the research description that it disguised the real intention.
- Seek permission of lower ranks, later requesting more formal acceptance from senior officers.
- Do no research.
- Resign from the police force.
- Carry out covert research.

The police officer chose the last option as this appeared to be the least unethical approach to get the job done. At least he was not overtly lying to anyone. Holdaway believed that his story had to be told and so the ends justified the means; an attitude that in itself is something of a concern in a serving police officer. I, too, however, believe that what I have experienced is important to others in the education culture, and my story has to be told. I believe that the abstract concepts underpinning the story – the key truths – have not changed with the fictionalisation of the events, and the truth remains. I was fortunate in that my research was not required to be covert. It was transparent, examined and permitted to proceed. I am, however, very conscious that I should do no harm (Ellis, 2004; Chang, 2008). It is for this reason that fictional autoethnography is suitable as the method for this study.

Criticism are raised against autoethnographers "for either being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, Para. 36). As Ellis et al. claim these criticisms suggest there can be no intermingling of art and science (Para. 39). I have attempted in this thesis to comingle the legal and academic aspects of the study placing them in a social context which is artistic. I have used this art as a medium, as did Graham Sydney, to show hidden factors and to hide the identity of others. I have achieved my goal in creating a seamless scenario with continuing truth and protecting the privacy of the actors. Sandelowski (1993) suggests that too much rigor may kill off the very usefulness of the research.

> [Research is both a creative and destructive process: we make things up and out of our data, but we often inadvertently kill the thing we want to understand in the process. Similarly, we can preserve or kill the spirit of qualitative work: we can soften our notion of [rigour] to include the playfulness, soulfulness, imagination, and technique we associate with more artistic endeavours, or we can harden it by the uncritical application of rules. The choice is ours: [rigour] or rigor mortis. (Sandelowski, 1993, p. 8)

As Sandelowski suggests we should not kill off the meaning of the story simply to comply to the politically correctness of a methodology which is, in itself, based on subjective interpretations (Sandelowski, 2003). Thus, fictional autoethnography requires a balance between the underlying truth and meaning of the observations and that of the philosophical assumptions that ground it (Flaherty, et al., 2002; Grant & Giddings, 2002). Traditionally, the quality of trustworthiness is based on a study's ability to be validated through rigorous analysis to establish reliability (Tuckett, 2005). Penrick (2017) suggests that this same trustworthiness in autoethnography is established through ensuring the credibility and transferability of the study. This is a concept that is akin to the legal concept of *ratio decidendi,* where a legal test is devised, whose application is transferable to all like situations. Just as in court, the essential measure of credibility is establishing whether the way data is represented, presented, interpreted, and collected is sound, true, and believable (Nicholls, 2009; Tuckett, 2005). In law it is (in civil cases) decided on the balance of probabilities; which *truth* is more probable? The story I have presented is based on field notes, student reports, contracts, governmental data, electronic reports, diary entries, emails, and my memory (closely monitored and corrected by my wife.) I have attempted to build transparency and credibility by accepting that this is my recollection and interpretation of events. The high degree of credibility and probability that events occurred resides in the transferability of the study to other teachers in similar situations. This credibility is supported today in 2018, where it is sad to see that newspapers are reporting similar situations are still replicating themselves and claims of the student "cash cows" are resurfacing (Burton-Bradley, 2018). Smiler fact evidence from more modern sources goes a long way to establishing the trustworthiness of this study.

Chang (2008) wrote that

> As in any other research endeavour, autoethnographers face the initial challenge of identifying a research focus: what to study. And as in ethnographic research, an initial focus will be refined, often narrowed and sometimes redirected in the course of the study. (Chang, 2008, p. 49)

The initial focus I started with did not form a hypothesis that needed to be proven or disproven; it was a vague shadow of an issue that one can see needs further examination. In my study, I was certain that university marketing had brought together a group of students who were not amenable to blended learning. Therefore, I framed my focus as "Does habitus affect learning-style inventories in relation to electronic learning management systems?" It is often the case in ethnographic studies that once the researcher embarks upon the fieldwork, they find that the focus decomposes or evolves into something quite different from that which was first envisaged. It soon became evident

that I was incorrect in my first assumption. However, it appeared that there were indeed issues; and that the students were the ones who were attempting to resolve them. The focus of the study turned from a pedagogical examination into an exploration of students' sociological interaction with the Australian education culture. To do this, it was necessary to understand the students' stories and create their combined narrative.

Polkinghorne (1988) sees narrative as "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful. Narrative meaning is a cognitive process that organises human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes" (p. 1). Experience and life do not have a narrative structure per se. Rather, they are constructed in the form of a narrative: "On reflecting on the incident, trying actively to understand it, you are constructing an account the structure of which is essentially narrative" (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986, p. 118). Therefore, narrative thinking can be seen as "creating a fit between a situation and the story schema" (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986, p. 111).

The reconstruction of experiences as narratives involves two kinds of processes of negotiation. First, internal/cognitive negotiation between experience and the story schema includes the use of prototypical narratives given in a culture. Second, external negotiation with (potential) listeners/readers means that others are able to be convinced by the story of the event, or to reject or doubt it in its major parts. For example, the telling of the story in terms or references to popular culture, such as surfers telling friends that *the wave was gnarly, dude.* The pop culture terminology reinforces the narrative giving it credence. The result of such processes is contextualised and socially shared forms of knowledge.

The construction of a shared narrative in this way is the process by which I have attempted to render my experiences into a temporal, meaningful episode covering some seven years of my teaching career. While this method is an auto-ethnographic narrative, it is more than just telling my personal story. It is a means of explicitly linking concepts from literature to the narrated personal and shared experience (Holt, 2001; Sparkes, 1996; Wall, 2008 ).

Sobers (2010) wrote in relation to his investigation into the benefits of community media:

> That the nature of the activity under investigation warrants an approach that is flexible and multi-disciplinary: sensibilities that can be found in the methodological framework of ethnography. As the favoured multi-method approach to anthropological research, ethnography employs a variety of tools for data gathering including interviewing, participant observation, analysis of secondary textual and visual sources oral histories, and other formal and informal techniques of data collection suitable for qualitative investigation. (Sobers, 2010, pp. 109-110)

Though the use of the autoethnographic style was not adopted until very late in the process of this thesis, the presentation of the thesis in such a style dovetails with the various phases of the research journey to give a clear continuous picture of a teacher's discovery of deficiencies in a teaching program; the pragmatic steps taken to rectify those deficiencies; and the further discovery of a deeper underlying issue. As the research journey unfolded, it became clear that the original focus was incorrect. The strange fact emerged that the students had indeed undertaken the online assessment. What had occurred is that there had been a collective decision not to submit the test. The narrative guides the reader through the discovery that the notion of habitus (Bourdieu, 1986, 1993a) has been correctly identified, though incorrectly placed in an educational context and not in the correct political context.

## 3.3 Methodology

### 3.3.1 A pragmatic search for a paradigm.

It is not enough to have a story about a bunch of disgruntled students and a very bewildered lecturer. A thesis such as this must have an academic basis. Very similar to the methodology mentioned previously, there should be a framework or field within which the work can be situated. This research originated from a very simple pragmatic approach to solve a practical problem. However, this pragmatic approach has itself been considered a research paradigm. A research paradigm in the social sciences has more recently been described as a "consensual set of beliefs and practices that guide a field" (Morgan, 2007, p. 49). This concept of paradigms has become popular in science and societal science research since the 1960s.

In his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn (2001) presents the view that major discoveries in science happen in episodes following periods of slow continuity. These anomalistic episodes create paradigms, which are "universally recognized scientific achievements that, for a time, provide model problems and solutions for a community of practitioners" (p. x). As research areas have divided, been reclassified and new areas discovered, there have been more moves to define the boundaries of a given research field together with the methods and shared beliefs that underpin it.

The introduction of paradigmatic standpoints has been one vehicle (among many) by which this move has been achieved (Hall, 2012). The advantage of paradigmatic standpoints is that any research in a given field can be regarded as comparable with other research, given that they shared the same values and beliefs, and used comparable data collection methods as understood within the particular standpoint. A difficulty identified with paradigmatic standpoints is that any strict method of data collection limits investigation into the field. Which paradigmatic standpoint best epitomises the various philosophical perspectives has been a point debated widely in the academic literature (Creswell, 2003; Greene, 2007; Hall, 2012; Morgan, 2007). How a paradigm encompasses a set of beliefs and practices has also been the subject of much debate. Morgan (2007) suggests that paradigms are viewed by researchers in four very different ways:

- Paradigms as world views.
- Paradigms as epistemological stances.
- Paradigms as shared beliefs in a research field.
- Paradigms as model examples.

A difficulty identified with each of these perspectives is that the method of collecting data is regulated by the views of those in the field who see the respective perspective as being incompatible with certain types of data collection (Guba & Lincon, 1994). Within the fields of academic research, it is an accepted phenomenon that there will be paradigmatic shifts, as explained by Kuhn (2001). The episodic changes in a given field give universal recognition to an accepted set of values, though only for a given time until the next episodic change occurs, which will question and replace the previous paradigm. With the rise of mixed-method data collection, the parameters of any given paradigmatic stance have been further challenged and expanded, which has given rise to a constant re-evaluation of these paradigmatic stances.

Hall (2012) gives a succinct overview of how paradigms have evolved over the decades. Hall's article outlines how mixed-method research has been claimed by authors, such as Guba and Lincoln (1994), not to be possible due to the incompatibility of paradigms which support either quantitative or qualitative research (Hall, 2012). More recently, researchers have developed three possible approaches that a mixed-method researcher might take (Creswell, 2003; Hanson, Creswell, Plano-Clark, & Creswell, 2005): the A-paradigmatic stance, the multi-paradigmatic stance and the single-paradigmatic stance. As Greene (2007) points out, the A-paradigmatic stance is supported by Patton:

> My practical (and controversial) view is that one can learn to be a good interviewer or observer, and learn to make sense of the resulting data, without first engaging in deep epistemological reflection and philosophical study…[one can] simply conduct interviews and gather observational data to answer concrete program and organisational questions without working explicitly with a particular theoretical, paradigmatic or philosophical perspective… without making a paradigmatic or philosophical pledge of allegiance (Greene, 2007; Sparkes, 1996, pp. 69-145).

In contrast to Patton, Hall contends that no research can be paradigm free, a view supported by other commentators in the field of mixed-method research (Creswell, 2003; Feilzer, 2010; Greene, 2007; Hall, 2012; Morgan, 2007). The reality is that many researchers get on with the research without regard to expressly spelling out their underpinning paradigm "which is left implicit" (Creswell, 2003; Hall, 2012, p. 3). By using the term "implicit", Hall speculates that even where a specific paradigm is not identified in a given research, the underpinning conventions of the type of data collection does, in itself, pigeonhole the research into a paradigmatic stance if not a specific paradigm. On this basis, the A-paradigmatic stance or no paradigm is not a viable sustainable stance.

The multi-paradigmatic stance was initially considered for this thesis. This stance suggests that researchers are not restricted to one paradigm in a study. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003b, 2003) further divide this stance into a complementary strengths thesis, a dialectic strength thesis and a multi-paradigm strength thesis. The possibility of complementary paradigms supporting each other had already been considered at the very early stages of this research journey, though the complementary strengths thesis suggests that each method of data collection should be viewed as a distinct subset of the entire study and evaluated separately (Morse, 2003). While this separation of data collection occurred in practice, the desire of this study was that data collected could be analysed as a whole. It was evident from a very early stage of this thesis that observation of the students involved in the study and quantitative data collection from the LMS were providing conflicting data in relation to the symptoms of the problem, which obscured the real underlying problem.

The dialectic strength thesis enables the researcher to select only the points of a paradigm that suit the current purpose (Greene, 2007). The dialectic strength thesis was again considered for its merits, though it was discarded for being somewhat arbitrary in that a conflict arising from different data collection methods could result in one set of data being discarded.

The multi-paradigm strength thesis suggested that the study itself – or at least the design of the study – would determine the paradigm (Creswell, 2003; Hanson, et al., 2005). This indeed appeared to be the case in my research. Hanson et.al. (2005) describe the design of a study utilising a multi-paradigm strength thesis underpinned by a pragmatic paradigm, which appeared tailor made for the current study. This design was able to accommodate both the retrospective (pre-2009 research) and contemporary (post-2009 research) components. The next question that arose was whether a paradigm was required, or was a standpoint, such as that of pragmatism, sufficient to give a basis for a consensual set of beliefs and practices for this research journey.

Hanson et al. (2005) suggest that one possible way to overcome the conflict of the four competing world views set out by Morgan (2007) is to take a pragmatic stance, which suggests that the research should be based on pragmatism and conducted to complete a task. Morgan (2007) claims that a pragmatic stance was first purported by scholars such as Dewey at the turn of the 20th century. He viewed as a standpoint "a method of getting the job done", not as a paradigm. Other commentators in the field, such as J. W. Creswell (2003), Greene (2007), Hall (2010), and Feilzer (2010), however, classify pragmatism as a paradigm not a standpoint. Feilzer (2010) suggests that:

> Pragmatism, when regarded as an alternative paradigm, sidesteps the contentious issues of truth and reality, accepts, philosophically that there are singular and multiple realities that are open to empirical inquiry and orients itself towards solving practical problems in the "real world." (Feilzer, 2010, p. 8)

This view accords with Humphreys and Watson (2009) that "No research account can ever be totally 'true' but that some accounts are truer than others" (Humphreys & Watson, 2009, p. 42). Accepting that this study was about solving a practical problem in the real world and recording the actions taken in such a manner as not to ostracise anyone, then a pragmatic paradigm seems to have been the most suitable framework to have worked with. The next problem was what evidence had I brought to this framework.

## 3.4 Where to start?

One of the first hurdles I encountered in commencing this research study was what would be the starting point of the thesis. Was the starting point in 2007, when I was first introduced to teaching at partner institutions and identified a problem existed? Or 2008, when I felt I had isolated the problem and took remedial steps? Or in 2009, when a different manifestation of the problem occurred?

The original thesis proposal was submitted and approved in the latter half of 2009, following the suggestion that the inquiry I had already undertaken into a cohort of international students should be written as a thesis. The proposed topic at that point was "Why would a particular cohort of international students refuse to undertake an online assessment?" This topic was accepted. There was an imperative to collect data as soon as possible. The nature of the students at the centre of the study – international students in Australia on student visas – meant that there was a strong likelihood that they would either graduate and move elsewhere or return to their home countries.

It is not usual to conduct field research for a doctorate until formal confirmation of the study has been approved by the appropriate university committee. In my case, however, I impressed the urgency of the situation on my academic supervisors. I explained the possibility that I would not be able to collect any data from the particular student cohort unless I commenced data gathering almost immediately. A survey was prepared quickly, which was to be given to both the original cohort of students in the first semester of 2009 that refused the original online assessment, and a current second semester student cohort that had accepted the online assessment without question.

I suspected that a comparison between the two groups would provide clues as to the reactions of the first cohort. The survey was then submitted to the required research ethics committee in an expedited application. This was approved provisionally on the condition that the stakeholder organisations – Newgarth University and the relevant partner institutions – would give formal permission for the research to proceed. This acceptance was promptly obtained. The survey was to be conducted at the end of the second teaching period (Semester 2) in 2009 to ensure that many of the students who participated in the original assessment that prompted the research in the first place were still enrolled at the university.

Events early in 2010 necessitated that the research study be postponed for 12 months. The consequence of this delay was that the original students who had completed the survey and taken part in interviews had left the university's partner institutions prior to my returning with transcribed copies of their interviews for discussion as planned. I had no way of contacting them. Although data had been collected by then, it was raw and unsubstantiated. At the commencement of 2011, the problem I faced was what would be the chronological starting point of the study? If it was 2007 or 2008, could it be said that a design had been applied to the study? Conversely, could a design be applied to the study from 2009 that would retrospectively acknowledge the previous work conducted with the students? Indeed, was it even possible to incorporate the data collected between 2007 and 2009 as this had not been collected for any systematic examination required of a thesis?

The original design of the thesis in 2009 had been narrowly based on the survey and triangulation of the survey results with the subsequent qualitative interview data. It was not until after recommencement of the research study, following the 12-month postponement in 2010, that the possibility was considered that the research had, in fact, started from the date of my employment at Newgarth in 2007. This research was a continuum that spanned the initial introduction to the partner institutions in 2007 and had continued concurrently to the present day as a narrative. That narrative was an account of a teacher attempting to resolve a teaching problem by pragmatic methods.

It was also not until this point that the realisation occurred to me that, although I had successfully gained higher pass rates amongst the international students at the partner institutions, these pass rates were only symptomatic of a deeper underlying problem, which my research at that point had not addressed. Was then the starting point for the thesis in 2007, 2009, or 2011? Each starting point would have, it seemed, brought with it its own difficulties. To further compound the difficulties, each starting point and the period of research associated with it utilised different methods of data collection.

It would have seemed logical to take the starting point of the research as 2007 when the journey began and when the initial identification of a problem occurred. Thus, from a pragmatic need, data collection had been via a mixture of different methods over that period. A specific design of mixed quantitative and qualitative data gathering (as described in the next section) was initiated from the application of the Ethics Committee approval in 2009. In the context of the entire research journey, it could be said that the mixed-method data collection was used from the very outset in 2007, with observation and experimentation being the main data collection methods.

## 3.5 Method

### 3.5.1 **Mixed methods.** The methodology used for the research study that is the subject of this thesis was established as a pragmatic stance viewed through a similar pragmatic lens that enabled a mixed method research design. Mixed methods are described as:

> The collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data was collected concurrently or sequentially, is given a priority, and involves the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research. (Creswell, Plano-Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003, p. 212)

Feilzer (2010, at p. 8) asks: "If phenomena have different layers, how can these layers be measured and observed"? To answer her own questions, Feilzer (2010) continues: "Mixed methods research offers to plug this gap by using quantitative methods to measure some aspects of the phenomenon

in question and qualitative methods for others" (Feilzer, 2010, p. 8). Hanson et al. (2005) also suggest that these collection methods may be used in single or multiphase studies.

It is without doubt that the process of data collection for this study was by a variety of methods, both qualitative and quantitative. A sequential pattern of data collection occurred over a period of five years through a series of seven phases. The phases are detailed in the next sections. At first, the early work of observation of the students' difficulties and remedial actions put in place are not considered as part of this thesis. The initial quantitative survey, likewise, was not originally planned to be part of this academic study but as a method to determine and demonstrate that a problem had indeed occurred with the implementation of the assessment in question. The student interviews and stakeholder interviews were the result of a specific and conscious design to follow sequentially from each phase (Creswell, 2003; Feilzer, 2010). The focus group interviews were a necessary addition once it became clear that the numbers of individual interviews would be insufficient.

### 3.5.2 Extrinsic data collection.

The next phase of the research design was to collect automatically generated reports such as those collated by the Blackboard LMS and those generated as a necessity for teaching classes such as statistics on class performance. These reports are blind statistics that do not contain any individual indicators. These reports gave a much clearer indication of where the students were underperforming (see Chapter 6). The analysis of these reports indicated that there was an unexpectedly low number of students who submitted an online assessment. This information provided the basis for a questionnaire to be designed that focused the research specifically on the area of the online assessment.

### 3.5.3 Application for ethics approval.

The initial and subsequent approval for this study was given by the Head of the Business School at Newgarth University. The survey that was conducted in the first instance was not originally planned as part of an ongoing study. The survey was intended as the basis of a report on the effectiveness of the school's implementation of blended learning. The recommendation to turn the survey and associated report into a PhD study was the head of school's suggestion.

For the original project, the associate professors from the school's Learning and Teaching Committee were cited as supervisors. The application stated the purpose, aims and method as:

> The research is to examine in detail students' attitudes towards the use electronic leaning management systems (LMS) (such as Blackboard). The research is aimed at the question why a specific cohort of students failed to access the LMS to their disadvantage. This cohort of students is representative of students who are taught by a hybrid structure of education which is now described as a "Blended Delivery Mode" of education. "Blended delivery" is a combination of face-to-face, distance learning and on-line delivery methods of teaching. This mode of delivery best describes XXXXXXXX University's method of educational delivery via partner institutions. The recognition of the Blended Delivery Mode displaces the Moderation mode previously used by the School of Business. It has been noted specifically in postgraduate Business Law courses offered by the University at partner institutions, that students fail to access the materials, teaching aids and even assessments which have been provided on the University's LMS.
>
> The aim of this research is to identify the factors which may help predict the usage and positive perception of Blackboard as an enhancement tool for face-to-face

teaching, by investigating students' usage and perceptions of the LMS Blackboard as operated by XXXXXXXXXXX University. It has been noted in conducting Business law courses offered at partner institutions that students failed to access XXXX's LMS even when required to for assessment. This tends to dispel the assumption that students require or desire LMS in a blended delivery mode. Students at partner institutions do however have access to internal "intranets" which are most commonly used for dissemination of materials such as course descriptions. These "intranets" are not normally able to be accessed by remote externally from the partner institution. While it is not possible to formulate a hypothesis at this stage, preliminary data suggests that students in a blended delivery mode seem not to prefer XXXXXXXX University's LMS.

Research has previously been conducted into the use of LMS in both the Distance Education model and the face-to-face delivery models of education (Picciano, 2002; Wood, 2004).

The object of this research is intended to add to this knowledge by examining the perceptions of students to LMS in a hybrid blended delivery mode. There are four key research questions:

1. student LMS usage
2. students' perceptions of LMS utility
3. Students' perception of Blackboard specifically
4. factors influencing usage and positive perceptions of XXXXXXXX University's LMS (Blackboard).

The use of LMS can provide distinct advantages for both students and staff alike. LMS can provide timely feedback for online assessments and free up teaching staff in other areas to provide face to face consultations which are not possible in a condensed time frame as required under a moderation teaching model. The benefits that can be gained by changing perceptions that LMS's are simply materials dissemination vehicles can have expected benefits to the XXXX student community. (Picciano, 2002; Wood, 2004)

The research is to be conducted by surveys and personal interviews of students in the MPA (Master of Professional Accounting) programme. Students who have recently undergone Business law courses will be surveyed as to why they did not access the LMS. New students who are entering the courses will also be interviewed as to their expectations and requirements from an LMS. This same cohort of students will be resurveyed at the end of the course to gain insight into their experiences. Some students will be selected at random, and subject to availability, will be invited to undertake qualitative interviews as to their experiences.

Data collection will be in seven stages.

It is proposed for the primary researcher to personally visit the classes to explain the purpose of the research project and invite the students to participate. The actual survey will be conducted at a later date.

Stage One, will survey the students who have most recently undertaken the course i.e. student in XXXXXXXX undertaken in semester 1 2009. This will be conducted by distribution of the survey questionnaire in class of the following Business Law course

in the MPA programme (XXXXXXXX) and collected by the lecturer at the end of class. This has been pre-arranged with the coordinator of XXXXXXXX. The questionnaires will be couriered to the primary researcher in a courier envelope provided.

Stage Two will ask these students to volunteer to be interviewed for qualitative data collection. Interviews will be conducted in focus groups at a date to be arranged.

Stage Three will ask these students to volunteer to be individually interviewed for qualitative data collection. Interviews will be conducted at a date to be arranged. Students may volunteer by emailing the primary researcher.

Stage Four will survey the students who will be undertaking the course XXXXXXX for the first time in semester two. This will be conducted by distribution of the survey questionnaire in class and collected by the lecturer at the end of class. The questionnaires will be couriered to the primary researcher in a courier envelope provided.

Stage Five will be again be a survey of the semester two class. This survey will be conducted during the last class of the semester. The questionnaires will be couriered to the primary researcher in a courier envelope provided.

Stage Six will ask these students to volunteer to be interviewed for qualitative data collection. Interviews will be conducted in focus groups at a date to be arranged.

Stage Seven will ask these students to volunteer to be individually interviewed for qualitative data collection. Interviews will be conducted at a date to be arranged. Students may volunteer by emailing the primary researcher.

It is estimated that the sample group will be in the region of 800 students.

The data will be collated into empirical tables. Qualitative answers will be utilised to interpret the quantitative data.

An ethics application on an expedited application for was applied for and granted. (Details withheld as this would identify individuals and institutions). It was important that I could not be seen to be in a situation where I could influence the students if they undertook the survey. It was for this reason that the survey was conducted in the second teaching period when I could arrange to have no teaching commitments at the partner institutions, and I could transfer the coordination (and thus moderation) of the units to another lecturer. I still taught at the parent university campus as these students were not the subject of the survey. I also, with permission from the head of school, made arrangements to teach, on contract, at an external provider in a management discipline. This external provider did not offer Newgarth degrees and was not associated with the partnership arrangement. It was an arrangement where this multi-national provider simply contracted with Newgarth to provide expert instructors for their programs in Australia. The funds from this contract work were placed in a trust account for me at Newgarth university specifically for use in my PhD study. These funds were used to pay for the extra coordination and external markers of all law units I taught for this teaching period. By this arrangement I ensured that I was not in a position to have any influence over the subjects of the survey. I was assured by the research coordinator at the Business School that standing aside from the coordination of the unit, the direct teaching of the subjects and the anonymous nature of the survey provided sufficient remoteness to remove possible influences.

One of the conditions for HREC approval was that all research participants were provided with a plain language information statement (PLIS) that set out the purpose and extent of the research and who to contact in case of concerns or complaints. The requirement to provide a separate PLIS for each location was my first hurdle. This required that a support agency or counselling service had to be

available to the participants should they experience stress as a result of undertaking the survey. Arranging such support was possible at Newgarth University; however, none of the partner institutions had on-campus counsellors. The HREC would not accept that participants at the partner institutions in other states would have ready access to the student counselling services at Newgarth via telephone or email. Counsellors had to be made available in the areas in which the partner institutions were located.

The next hurdle was to obtain the permission from the partner institutions to conduct the survey. This proved to be the most difficult and time-consuming part of the process. The partners in one state did not have any problem with the survey and welcomed the opportunity to participate. In Sydney, it was necessary for me to personally visit the two partner institutions to explain the purpose and intended outcomes of the research. One partner institution was very accommodating. The other large provider was less accepting and required very stringent conditions to ensure the privacy of the participants and the that identity of the institution remained anonymous. This institution specified that permission was granted only on the condition that there was a right of approval, and that the finished research was seen prior to distribution (see para 6.2.2.4). The process of seeking approval and the subsequent meetings with the managers for this purpose is set out in more detail in Chapter 6. The application was eventually approved.

The application for ethics approval for the qualitative interviews had expired prior to their being conducted. Based on my experience with the first application, the second ethics application for extensions and ethics approval proved to be more difficult to obtain than I had expected. The general application and its associated forms and requirements seemed simple enough initially. The Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) risk assessment template could be undertaken on the expedited application form as there was very little risk to any person or persons involved in the research. As this was now a research proposal for study purposes I was, however, again required to renew the assurances that I was not in a position to influence the students who were the subject of the interviews. It was essential that the students would feel no compulsion to participate in the interviews due to any perceived authority I may have. To achieve this, I again made the same proactive arrangements as with the previous application to ensure that I would not have any specific academic responsibility for any student who was a possible subject of the survey. As the original approval for the study had been granted the second application ended up as a tick in a box indicating a change of supervisors. (See also the discussion in 5.3.2)

**3.5.4 Questionnaire design.** Newgarth University decided that at the end of 2009 Blackboard was no longer to be utilised as the LMS for the university, opting instead for the freeware "Moodle" to use as the LMS. This move to a new LMS platform changed the parameters of the study and as a consequence the design of the survey questionnaire. The move also engendered a further matter of urgency to the research. When an idea of the survey was mooted at the end of teaching period 1, 2009, in my mind was what in legal circles would be called a *fishing trip*. It was evident that something had been amiss with the implementation at Newgarth University's partner institutions of the online assessment for the commercial law units in teaching period 1, 2009, although it was not clear exactly what. I decided to conduct the survey across two cohorts of students from teaching periods 1 and 2 in 2009 undertaking the commercial law units to attempt a comparison. However, at

the time I was designing the survey, it was not known whether the modified online assessment in teaching period 2 would achieve a different reaction from students.

The survey questionnaire has been reproduced in Appendix 1 to demonstrate the structure of the questionnaire and grouping of questions. The wording of the introduction to the questionnaire was slightly different for the returning class from Teaching Period 1; however, the questions remained the same.

The purpose of surveying the students from two different teaching periods was to make the subject group larger and to capture all the students who at that time would have taken the online test. The intention was to give the survey to the students simultaneously in class to prevent students from collaboratively filling out the forms. I wanted to gain their individual opinions. The proposed stage *four survey* of the incoming class on teaching period 2 was abandoned due to the logistics of conducting the survey.

To create the survey, I initially turned to my trusty undergraduate copy of *Surveys in Social Research* (de Vaus, 1995). It became very clear at an early stage that the theories offered in de Vaus (1995) especial in relation to Likert scales would need modification in the culturally diverse context to which it needed to be applied. I decided to utilise a derivation of a tool called a web-based learning environment instrument (WEBLEI) developed by Chang and Fisher from Curtin University Australia (Chang & Fisher, 2006). The WEBLEI is used to assess the effectiveness of blended learning and fully online delivered courses (Chang & Fisher, 2006). The WEBLEI is also used as an instrument to analyse students' subjective perceptions of various elements of a given online component of a course and reduce this to a numerical score. The higher the score, the more accepted the component of the subject course is to students. One of the problems I encountered designing the questionnaire was that the commercial law unit in question was neither an online unit nor fully utilised blended learning. Also, I was only interested in this one assessment. The WEBLEI was not a suitable instrument for these requirements. By sketching the WEBLEI, (I use the term *sketching* in this context to demonstrate that the WEBLEI was used as nothing more than an outline for my survey) I was able to tailor the question for the survey to cover the issues I had encountered. It was useful to use Chang and Fisher's research results to gain an indicium, though no direct comparisons could be made due to the quite substantial changes in the Survey.

When Chang and Fisher applied the WEBLEI, participants are asked to respond to a series of statements on a Likert scale with the following choices: 5 – Always; 4 – Often; 3 – Sometimes; 2 – Seldom; 1 – Never (Warrick, 2005). The survey was divided into four sections, each addressing a different scale within the four domains of:

- Scale 1: Access
- Scale 2: Interaction
- Scale 3: Response
- Scale 4: Results. (Chandra & Fisher, 2006)

In the diagrammatic representation in Figure 14, the scales are arranged in an anti-clockwise movement.

*Scale I:* deals with the students' ability to access the online component. Successful access encourages the students, difficult access discourages the students and creates frustration (Hara & Kling, 1999).

*Scale II:* analyses the students' participation in the component, both in terms of co-participating with the presenter but also in terms of collaboration with the community of practice/inquiry (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

*Scale III:* relates to the students' subjective cognitive experience such as enjoyment, frustration or tedium (Fraser. & Tobins.K, 1998). it is also called cognitive presence (Akkoyyunlu, & Yilmaz-Soylu, M., 2008; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

*Scale IV:* Chang and Fisher (2006) suggest that this scale relates to the actual interface of the online component and corresponds to aesthetics, ease of navigation, validity of content, and the ability to meet a variety of different learning styles by providing a variety of formats and organisational structure with descriptions and purpose statements.

| | |
|---|---|
| Scale II<br>Co-participatory<br>INTERACTION<br>Participation, collaboration and cooperation | Scale I<br>Emancipatory<br>ACCESS<br>Virtual subject |
| Scale III<br>RESPONSE<br>Perceived student responses<br>Qualia | Scale IV<br>RESULTS<br>Scope, structure, content, learning objective<br>Information structure and design |

*Figure 11. Diagrammatic representation of WEBLEI.* Adapted from "The validation and application of a new learning environment instrument for online learning in higher education," by V. Chang and D. Fisher, in D. L. Fisher and M. S. Khine (Eds.), *Technology Rich Learning Environments: A Future Perspective* (p. 12), 2006, Singapore, Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd. Copyright 2006 by World Scientific Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd. Reprinted with permission.

One advantage of utilising a sketch of the WEBLEI was that studies had already been conducted (Chandra & Fisher, 2006; Chang & Fisher, 2006; Skelton, 2009). One of these studies was conducted in New Zealand by Skelton in a contextually similar setting to that of the current survey, though with domestic students. Skelton (2009) also modified the WEBLEI to suit the specific environment of the course and the institution to which he applied it. Skelton argued that the modification did not affect the utility or credibility of the WEBLEI. His modified version enabled him to concentrate on the area

that was problematic in the particular blended-learning environment and provided a less complicated survey for the participants. I chose to follow his lead.

In terms of the academic environment of these two studies, the material content, infrastructure, and academic level of the students were all similar. The major differences were that the subject group from the Newgarth University partner institutions was made up entirely of students with English as a second other language (ESOL), the unit did not fully implement blended learning and that the survey was taken across multiple institutions.

In relation to language limitations, my students in Australia were all ESOL (English as a second other language) students, and it is assumed that Skelton's study group was entirely New Zealand domestic students at a single partner institution to New Zealand's Massey University. An assumption had to be made that English is a first language of these students, though this is not specified. Having practised law in this region I have personal knowledge that the indigenous language of Maori is widely spoken in this area. While most indigenous persons in the area are bilingual, with English a first language, it would be unusual to find someone who spoke no English at all. In Chang and Fisher's WEBELI it was not mentioned whether the students were domestic international or a combination. The distinction in that study was between genders.

I took my ideas for the survey from the WEBLEI Access Scale I. The reason for this was that Chang and Fisher (2006) suggest that the first step in successfully using an LMS is to ensure that the learners are able to effectively access the internet. The internal reports from the LMS indicated that the students at partner institutions were able to access the Newgarth University LMS via the internet, yet the anecdotal stories from students suggested otherwise (AUQA, 2009).

As a generalisation, I had observed that students at the partner institutions were less comfortable accessing the LMS via the internet than using the internal systems of the respective partners (AUQA, 2009). The survey was sketched on the WEBLEI Access Scale I in order to explore the students' perceptions of accessibility to the LMS. The survey questions were styled to explore this conflict between the students' narrative and the objective quantitative data while attempting to remove any language barriers that this may pose. A Likert scale is problematic in terms of a cohort of ESOL students in that it attempts to assess a possible spectrum of beliefs or perceptions utilising subjective criteria. In a Likert scale, both ends of the spectrum are absolute. In the case of the WEBLEI, 5 means "always" and 1 means "never." The remaining values are variable and relate to an individual's subjective perception of their experiences. For example, in the Likert scale "sometimes" will have a value between "never" and "always." However, "sometimes" will be variable depending on the person, the context, and the situation. The terms "often" and "seldom" are equally vague. Such imprecise terms, in my experience, tend to create confusion for students with ESOL (Ogden & Lo, 2011). Ogden and Lo (2011) explain that cross-cultural use of values in a Likert scale do not always operate as predicted, citing a problem where "members of different cultures [use] other members of the same culture for comparison when rating their responses…" (Ogden & Lo, 2011, p. 2). In my own observation, it is common for younger people to generalise about such variables. In conversations with my children and their friends *sometimes* invariably was converted to *always* when a point was being emphasised; for example, my daughter would say "*you always complain about how short my skirt is!"* when I am sure the conversation only occurred sometimes.

It had already been observed that the predominantly Indian students, and the less predominant, though well represented, Sri Lankan and Nepalese students at partner institutions C and D were, in the main, bright articulate people who had already managed degrees. They had a very strong command of English, they were though, in my experience, still prone to what I will term as these exaggerations of youth. These students tended to work collaboratively (see section 5.3.1.) There

was a real possibility that the students could deliberately, or inadvertently, skew responses to a Likert scale to a negative or positive outcome. Thus, the use of the Likert scale could present problems regarding the validity of the study. For this reason, I attempted to reduce the likelihood of the collaboration effect in the survey by first conducting the survey in class, simultaneously across all participating partner institutions, which would reduce the amount of discussion possible. Second, I replaced the Likert scale of the survey form for the WEBLEI format with closed "yes/no" questions followed by an open-ended request for the participants to explain their responses. The "I" questioning, or funnel questioning, technique is one used in legal and qualitative interviewing (Flick, 2002; Lauchland & Le Brum, 1996). This is a form of interview questioning I have used in practice for many years.

An example of the *I* question's style is:

"Do you use the internet?" Yes/no

"If yes, did you prefer to use your institution's intranet?" Yes/no

"Did you prefer to use to Blackboard?" Yes/no

"If you have answered yes to the questions above, why was this?"

"If you have answered no to the questions above, why was this?"

The purpose of "*I"* questioning is to guide the subject to answer the questions that are being asked and not be side-tracked. The *open* question at the end of the block of questions allows the subject to provide an explanation for their answers. This is very important as the subject must feel that they have been heard and not pushed into an incorrect answer. It also allows an opening for matters to be raised that were not in the interviewer's contemplation.

In order to translate the responses into a quantitative value, the answers to the open-ended qualitative questions were coded into five categories; each category corresponds with the Likert division of the positive/negative scale and was assigned a numerical identifier from 1 to 5, with 1 being "strongly disagree." By this process of coding the responses, there was a standardisation of the quantification value, which removed the possible cultural collaborative effect. This method was described by Chandra and Fisher (2006) and used successfully by them over a two-year period in a Queensland high school. It was necessary for me to manually code these responses as access to SPSS and Nvivo qualitative data analysis software was restricted by my distance from a Federation University campus. (Several thousand kilometres, in fact.)

In addition to the questions on access, the survey questionnaire targeted five other aspects. These were as follows:

- Demographic. (Age, educational background, ethnicity and employment commitment of the students)
- Technical knowledge
- Current usage practices of internet and electronic medium
- Current experiences of internet and electronic medium
- Expectation of blended-learning tools.

Ng and Tsoi (2008) identified in their Hong Kong study that it was the students' *perceptions* which dictated their level of acceptance of blended learning rather than actual reality. If a student perceived there was a problem in accessing online components of blended learning, their mindset, or frustration, created an obstacle for them regardless of whether that obstacle actually existed or not (Ng & Tsoi, 2008).

Both Ng and Tsoi (2008) and Battye and Carter (2009) cite the five aforementioned aspects as being the most important in influencing students' perceptions of blended learning and their expectations about online access and dealing with the LMS interface. Battye and Carter (2009) identify these same aspects as important in the administrative rollout of blended learning. The intention of the survey was to note if anything in the students' educational background was creating barriers to their use of the LMS. Such barriers might include the following:

- Whether students were too busy with paid work to access study material outside of normal business hours.
- Whether students had a computing facility off-campus.
- Whether students of a particular cultural background had more difficulty than others.
- Whether students had previous technical knowledge.
- Students' current usage and experience with online materials.

The survey was trialed on 15 volunteers at the parent campus. It was explained to the volunteers that this trial was not part of the survey and no information would be collected. The purpose of the trial was to see if the questions in the form were accessible. Any comments the students wished to make were very welcome. Of these volunteers, four were domestic, one identified as Vietnamese, six identifies as Chinese, one identified as Mongolian, and three identified as Punjabi (a region in India). None of these volunteers experienced any difficulty with the language or questions in the survey form. The only comment made was the Mongolian student felt very isolated, and thus struggled to find necessary resources without help. The student had deliberately chosen an Australian city to study in in an effort to experience Australian life. However, the student was finding it difficult to find and make connections. [As a side note: On hearing this, several of the other volunteers arranged to take the Mongolian student for a meal in the hope that other activities could be arranged. I believe an excursion was organised to the Great Barrier Reef during the end of semester break].

The survey was conducted, with five hundred and fourth four students being surveyed across five partner institution campuses. The survey was conducted in class, with no prior warning to the students. Each student was given a plain language information statement (PLIS) that explained that the survey was voluntary. The PLIS also contained the contact details for the primary researcher, and the help and counselling resources.

The PLIS, the agreement to participate and the survey forms were handed out at the beginning of the last class in Teaching Period 2 after the close of online assessment in that teaching period. The survey was explained to the students by the lecturer, who read from a prepared instruction sheet. The instructions to the lecturer of the classes were to tell the students that the survey was being conducted in an effort to improve the online resources; the surveys were completely voluntary and

confidential. The survey was being conducted blind, which meant it was not possible to identify individual students. Students who did not wish to participate were told simply not submit the form.

The survey was conducted at partner institutions A, C, and D in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide, (five campuses in all) in the last week of Teaching Period 2, 2009. This week was chosen as it is traditionally the week when examination preparation occurs, and hints are given to the students. For this reason, lectures at this time usually have among the largest attendances of the teaching period, and there is usually very little new academic content in them. In using this window of opportunity, the survey could be conducted with the least disruption to the students' studies while reaching the maximum number of potential participants. The survey was not given to the students at Partner B in Melbourne as the administration at this institution did not want to participate in the study. Partner A in Melbourne did agree to participate; however, this institution operated on a different semester timetable to the other partner institutions, which made the logistics of conducting the survey simultaneously with the other institutions impracticable. The cohort of students at Partner A from Teaching Period 1, 2009 was no longer available, so only those students undertaking the commercial law units in Teaching Period 2, were surveyed. The completed survey forms were collected by the relevant lecturer and returned to their respective administrators. I had arranged for prepaid and addressed courier bags to be sent to the participating partner institutions, together with the forms and other material, for the return of completed survey forms. The courier bags with the completed forms were delivered to me at Newgarth University. Of the possible five hundred forty-four respondents, three hundred fourteen returned forms were used in the research study. As is explained fully in sections 5.4 on page 143, one hundred forty-two completed surveys forms from Sydney were lost. A further eighty-eight returned survey forms were unusable due to illegibility, non-completion or inappropriate comments. [eighty were blank, three had illegible writing, five complained that the use of the word black in Blackboard made it a racist instrument (see page 161 for the focus group comments)]. Consequently, three hundred fourteen completed forms were used as the basis for the results.

**3.5.5 Focus groups.** It was anticipated that the number of volunteers who would be interested in participating in a qualitative interview would be very small and not seen as sufficient to give a clear picture of difficulties encountered by the majority of students. In an attempt to gain a better insight into the quantitative scores, it was decided when submitting the ethics applications to hold focus groups at several of the partner institutions using the scores gained in the survey as the topics of the question put to the groups. (See section 6.3)

There were two groups held in Melbourne at Partner C – one for each of the past and current cohorts – and four groups held in Sydney: two at Partner D and two at Partner C. The groups were conducted after teaching had finished for the semester but prior to the final examination. The focus groups were held in conjunction with an extra workshop on examination tips and preparation. These workshops were conducted by the head of the law stream. The workshops were conducted in the large lecture theatres at the respective partner institutions. The PLIS was distributed to the students at the commencement of the workshop. Once the material for the workshop had been presented, the head of the law stream, left the theatre and I entered. I informed the students that I would like to talk to them in relation to the survey. The talk was completely voluntary, and no one had to remain. I explained the PLIS, asked if there were questions and again if anyone wished to leave. The students were asked questions based on the responses to the survey. This was an attempt to gain a clearer picture of the reasons for those responses.

### 3.5.6 Analysing episodic interviews.

The interviews were conducted at partner institutions' premises in interview rooms provided for student–staff consultation. The rooms are private glass cubicles that are soundproof but have security for both interviewer and participant in that they can be seen at all times by other staff and students.

The interviews took place over a period of three weeks. This was so as the first interview could be transcribed, passed on to the participant and then a second interview be conducted. All of the participants have now left Australia.

### 3.5.7 Qualitative interviews.

The fourth method of data collection was qualitative data collection from interview responses.

Six students completed the section on the survey form that indicated they would consider volunteering to be interviewed. One student withdrew after I contacted them; a second withdrew after the start of the interview. There were four students remaining who completed the interviews. All of these students were at Partner C in Melbourne.

It was decided to use the form of interviewing known as *episodic*. The episodic interview, as suggested by Flick (1996), had been identified as the most suitable form of interviewing for the purpose of this study. The rationale for this type of interviewing was to address certain time periods in the students' educational history that may provide clues to the cohort's reluctance to undertake the online assessment.

The interviews were conducted with students undertaking postgraduate commercial law courses. The episodic interviews enquired into specific periods of the students' education history. The students were encouraged to respond in a narrative form for each historical episode. The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, which created "wave files" of them. The collected interviews were transcribed; I had intended to meet again with the participants to go through the transcripts. However, time constraints and personal circumstance prevented this. A copy of each transcript was sent to each participant for them to read. They were invited to strike out any information that they did not want to be used in the research, and any such material identified by the participant would be removed. No transcripts were turned down by the interviewees.

Flick (1996) describes the usefulness of this type of interviewing technique, where the issues under study are a social representation of the subject's life; however, it is not the life itself but a representation, a memory of that life. By applying this method to the study, it was hoped that the interviewees would unlock the social knowledge which is shared by this group; Flick (1996) contends that minute changes occur daily in everyone's life. While these changes are concrete in a situational context, they tend to go unobserved even though they impact on the lives of the subject and those around them. Over time, the cumulative sum of the changes alters a subject's lifestyle. Flick (2002) points out that children grow up today completely different from earlier years due to the impact of technology on their lives (Flick, 2002). The episodic-interview method is grounded in a concrete situational context, yet it is sensitive to small incremental changes that accrue into major changes in attitude and actions over time. The use of this method is to identify those incremental attitude shifts that may determine the direction of a subject's study habits in education. For example, could non-exposure to electronic media be a reason that could deter students from accepting online

components of a course as central to the learning materials as Skelton (2009) had observed in New Zealand.

Flick's (1996, 2002) episodic-interview method consist of the following eight phases:

- Preparation for the interview
- Introducing the interview principle
- The interviewee's concept of the issue and his/her biography in relation to the issue
- The meaning of the issue for the interviewee's everyday life
- The central parts of the issue under study
- Focusing more general topics referring to the issue under study
- Evaluation and small talk
- Documentation.

Data Collection Strategies

Data for this study was collected in the form of journals, field-notes, personal archives, and cultural archives. As part of my activates to improve the Commercial Law unit right from day one in 2007, I documented changes that were made via journal entries. I also took notes during discipline stream meetings, school meetings, and meetings with representatives from the partner institutions. I also kept case notes of when students came to see me or when I was required to see other students. These notes were basic and referred to physical activities only. At this stage the thought that the emotional aspect of any such meetings could be useful was not considered. They were, however, a good memory jogger and provided accurate timelines. These notes, together with collected emails, flyers, teaching evaluations, meeting agendas, and other documents such as a teaching portfolio I have established and kept up to date over this period, provided a very good base to work from.

The conversations I had with students and staff over this time did have a profound effect on me. It was not difficult from these memory joggers to recall the emotion that I felt as sympathy towards the students and unsympathetic to others. Reclassifying these contemporary case notes as data provided the resources material for an autoethnographic study. The methods that were used to gather data evolved over time. At first my data was being collected for an empirical study, my awareness that data was being collected for an ethnographical study required a different method and even later when I fixed on autoethnography, the method of data collection changed with my interactions with the environment (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

It was not until I looked back in introspection at these documents that I realised how my thinking had changed. While some researchers have the knowledge that they are conducting contemporaneous research, other autoethnographers such as myself construct a narrative from notes and journals and from occurrences that are more distant, recollected and reflected upon (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis 2013). Ellis's *Ethnographic I* (2004) gives examples of the *students* who were attempting to recreate the lived experience using the recollection and reflection method of to describe their experiences. Such was my case. It was not until I looked back upon these documents and artefacts that I realised I was/am an international student. True, most of my language was

similar to Australian but it was regularly pointed out to me at Newgarth, that I was no longer in the Land of the Long White Cloud. I, too, was having difficulties with culture and difficulties with study and Institutions. I could truly say "I know how that feels."

**3.5.8 Data analysis.** The data from interviews was examined using the method of analytical induction as developed by Flick (2002). The process was to construct validity triangulation within the qualitative interview questions themselves.

After this had been completed, the transcripts were analysed using the method of analytical induction (Flick, 2002). Analytic induction is a method of systematic interpretation of events, in this case the personal experiences of students' education history. Analytic induction includes the process of generating hypotheses as well as testing them. The benefit of this method is that it focuses on the exception, the case that is deviant to the hypothesis.

The reports generated by Blackboard suggested that the cohorts of students undertaking the Masters of Professional Accounting (MPA) deviated from that which the studies of Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz-Soylu (2008) and Skelton (2009) would consider to be the norm by resisting the use of electronically augmented materials. The survey results provided little more information that there was a problem. By analysing the qualitative data against the quantitative and objective data, a different picture developed. A theme emerged in the qualitative data of the importance of groups, group work and communities not only for the students but also for all those interviewed. By re-analysing the qualitative data against this theme, a markedly different picture emerged of the students acting in a very logical and predictable manner. It was here that I started re-examining data from the narratives in light of a collective body rather than individual performance.

Autoethnographical Data Analysis.

The data for this study was derived from various sources through various mixed methods. This data was analysed according to the respective methods. The interview data was coded to create a matrix where patterns in the participants' education could be identified. The feedback from the focus groups was treated in a similar manner identify recurring themes and topics (Chang, 2008). The topics of the autoethnographic narrative were placed in timelines much as possible, this was then compared with a similar timeline from the other artefacts collected. Where the material created timelines or patterns showed that data was omitted or missing which could complete the timelines or patterns, that missing material was also evaluated and assessed. This method helped to establish fuller completed pictures of the study (Chang, 2008). The identified reoccurrence was then overlaid on known academic theories (Penrick, 2017). The final steps are to reflect upon this analysis and the relationship and connectivity between one's self and the community, and to connect the historical aspect to the present (Chang, 2008).

## 3.6 Conclusion

The difficulties encountered at the commencement of this thesis were where to start and what to include. The study simply revolved around a cohort of students and why they did not undertake an online assessment. Although the thesis and the first survey associated with that study started in 2009, it soon became clear that this thesis was not about the individual but about the community of students.

Once this was realised it became a matter of some importance to incorporate everyday course development into the fabric of this thesis. This required a framework that would incorporate the

ordinary course development and the phases of the planed research design. The pragmatic paradigm fitted this requirement. This paradigm accepts that the early development was a matter of simply getting the job done. The paradigm also accommodated the multi-method data collection process that was designed around the existing WEBLEI model.

It was after these first data collection stages and initial analysis that it was discovered there appeared to be conflicting evidence. Where it was reported anecdotally that students could not access Newgarth University's LMS, the online reports showed this not to be the case. A second cohort of students in a following semester displayed no reluctance or inability to undertake a similar online assessment.

Further analysis indicated that while the focus questions underpinning the study were correct, they had been incorrectly applied. In order to explain how this had occurred, an ethnographical narrative was constructed, which commenced at my introduction to the study problem and concluded with an analysis of the data. It suggested that this cohort of students was acting logically for their political goal, a goal which differed from that of the academic context they were engaged in.

# *Chapter 4*

# *Reporting the Research:*

# *Phase 1 – Identifying the Historical Context of the Issue*

## 4.1 Introduction

The expected simplicity of the case study belied the complex layers of competing interests, which were imposed upon, and affected, this cohort of students. This complexity and the need for anonymity had tended to make the actual auto-ethnography somewhat disjointed and difficult for the reader. Therefore, in order to engage the reader, I have created this historical account of the multifaceted contextual situation that led to the actions of the students at the centre of the study. The historical account is introduced as a background to the story "10 days in 2009, it could have happened this way" in an effort to introduce heavily disguised facts that identify and describe the layers of geographical, socio-political, governmental, academic, societal, economic and cultural influences of the period on a particular group of international students. The relevant events are organised into a chronological time line though they did not occur in such a linear fashion. The narration is presented in my voice as lecturer and coordinator of the units in question.

The contextual description presented in this chapter introduces a theme which emerges of its own volition and becomes an undertow finally surfacing under analysis. It is a conflict between education for betterment via academic advancement and education for betterment via legislative requirement (Maton, 2006). In short, the conflict is that of gaining a degree for acquisition of personal knowledge versus gaining a degree to meet immigration legislative requirements.

My story continues by positioning Newgarth University as a critical player in the events of civil and cultural unrest experienced by many international students at the time. The events were well publicised at the time and the original evidence was drawn from the media and government reports of the period. Though due to the necessity to keep certain facts withheld, it must be regarded, to coin a phrase from *Sir Frances Drake* by E. F. Benson, "as jumping from tussock to tussock through a quagmire of conjecture before we can step out without fear of being bogged" (Benson, 1927, preface). Scant but secure evidence must be relied upon before arriving at a logical conclusion. The background and context discussed in this section covers the period from 2007 to mid-2009.

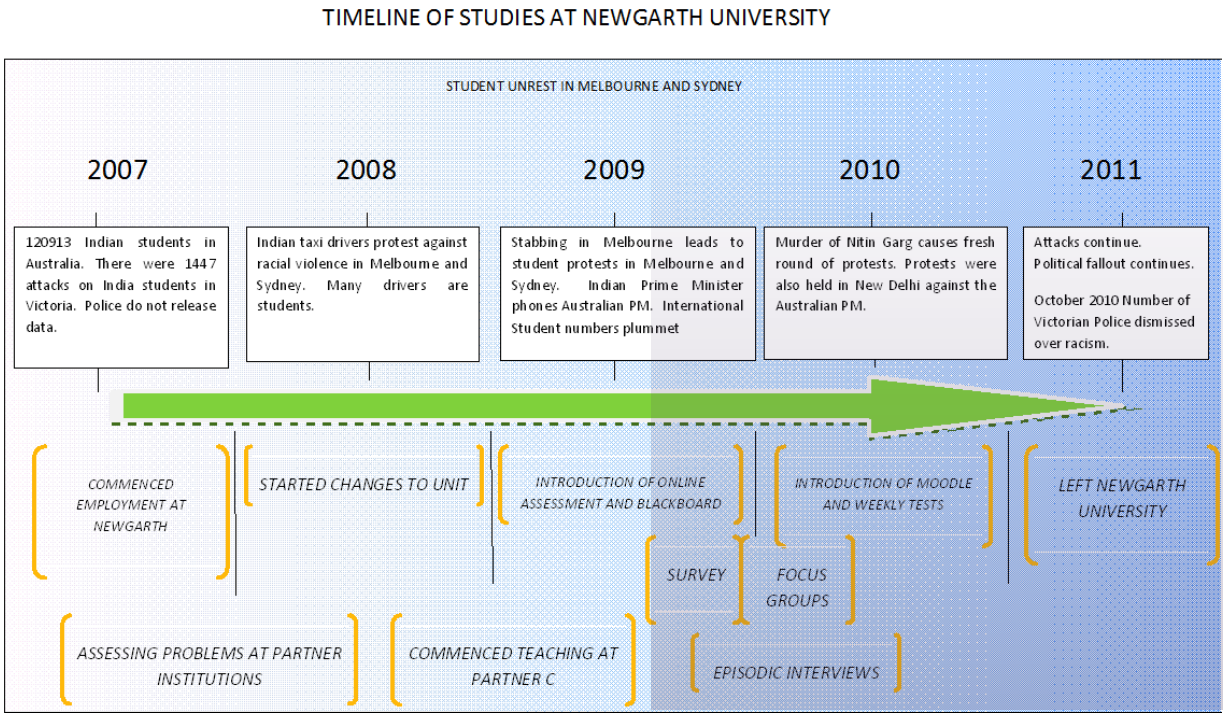



*Figure 12.* Timeline covers the period from 2007 to mid-2009.

## 4.2 Newgarth University 2001–2010

The fictitious Newgarth University is a dual-sector, rural university offering vocational education and training (VET) and higher education. The once-flourishing town of Newgarth, notably hailed by international celebrities, built on its reputation and the result of its success in the 1850s, but has suffered an economic decline since the 1970s. The decline has been due, in part, to the cessation of that early industry and the reduction of primary production in the area. The state plan for rationalisation and centralisation contributed a great deal to the more recent acceleration of this decline (Victoria Department of Environment, 2011). Newgarth had remained somewhat provincial with a reputation for being a rural town. Though some major industry still exists there, it is not enough to compete with other more industrialised areas closer to the major metropolitan centres.

The decline has led to an interesting population movement. Newgarth has gained residents from the surrounding environs (profile.id.com.au., 2011). The newcomers are largely in the over-55 age group. The newcomers in this age group were not, however, demographically suitable to stem the predicted declining student enrolment numbers for Newgarth University. Other regional universities in Victoria – as in other states - have also demonstrated similar decline due to population shifts to main centres. Research by academics at the old Ballarat University (which once shared catchment borders and overlaps with Newgarth) has shown that there is a serious educational disadvantage experienced by students in regional and rural areas, which constitute similar catchment area's to Newgarth's, due in part to the:

> … precarious state of many rural communities, the decline of services, fewer transport options, disaffection of young people, youth depression and suicide, rural insecurity, low morale caused by drought and rural contraction, low incomes, unemployment, increased

> risk taking, drug abuse and unsafe sexual activity among the young, retreat of professionals to large towns and cities, high unemployment and poor community health.(Golding, Barnett, Brown, Angus, & Harvey, Report to the Victorian Parliament 2009, p.4)

This disenchantment with rural life amongst younger residents, together with the encroachment of residential suburbs on what was once rural land, has seen a net drift of those residents in the 24 to 35-year-old age group towards the bright lights of the larger metropolitan centres. This is the age group who would traditionally undertake postgraduate studies (Sheedy, 2015). The majority of this group have settled in the area known as the western corridor (profile.id.com.au., 2011; Victoria Department of Environment, 2011), which extends in a radius some 35 kilometres west from the Melbourne CBD and south towards Geelong, what was the second largest city in the region. The western corridor has grown from an estimated combined population of 8,000 in 1999 to 98,400 in the northern portion of the corridor in 2011 (profile.id.com.au., 2011). A further 199,715 residents have settled in the southern portion of the corridor. In 2015, Profile.id, a population profiling service used by Newgarth City Council, extrapolated that this corridor has had a net growth of 400,000 residents since 2000, and these areas are still increasing (profile.id.com.au., 2015; Wyndham City Council, 2015). The graph in Figure 16, released in a news article, indicates that there have been nearly 60,000 applications in the past 10 years for subdivisions to meet the demand for low-cost housing in the area (Lucas, 2016). The graph also shows that in 2016 alone there were 9,000 applications (Lucas, 2016). In 2018 Wyndham became the second largest city in Victoria (Macaulay, 2018) .

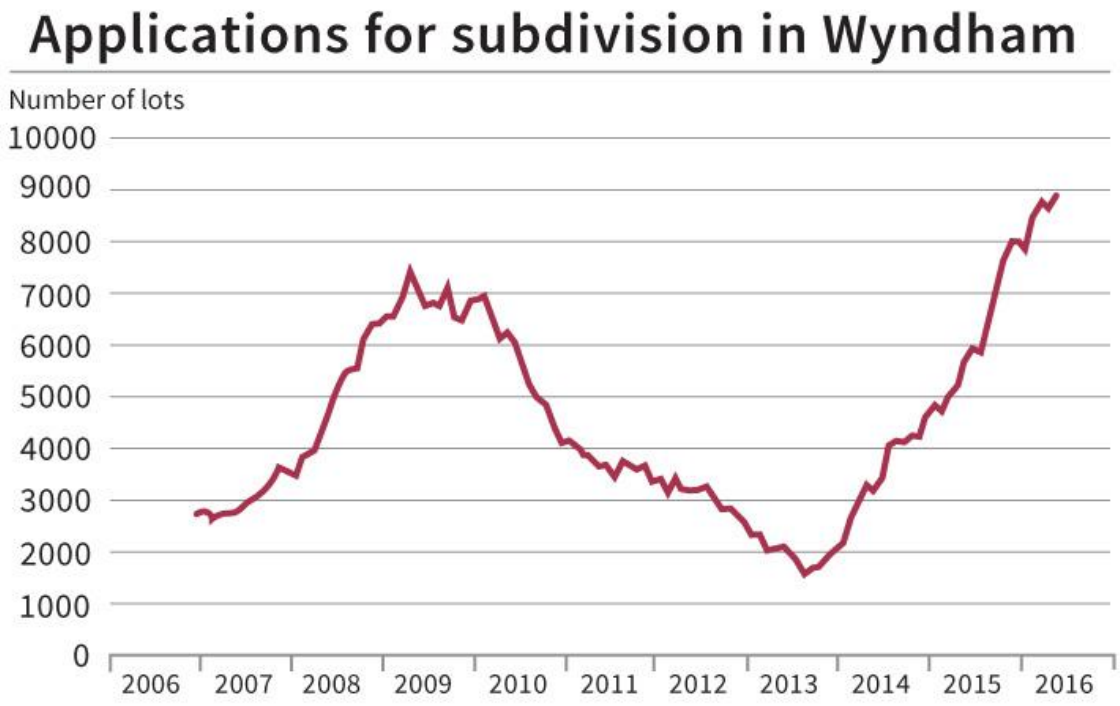



*Figure 13.* 2016 subdivision applications in Wyndham shire. From "Fears for Melbourne's West as Huge Growth Outpaces Infrastructure," by C. Lucas, 25 July 2016. *The Age*. Copyright 2016 by *The Age*. Reprinted with permission.

For Newgarth University, the urban migration has forced it to reduce its presence in the heartland of its rural catchment area and focus on other catchment areas. This concentration of increased population in the western corridor running through the hinterlands of Newgarth's catchment also falls within the catchment areas of several major metropolitan universities. These universities, due to

their much larger size than Newgarth University, can offer a greater choice of degrees and programs, resources, activities, opportunities and socialisation; in short, they can offer the university life style.

The population growth in this corridor, rather than being a boon for Newgarth University, has subjected it to much greater competition for students. However, early in the millennium, Newgarth strategically decided not to compete with the other universities who had established a presence in the Newgarth catchment area, including the western corridor, and had seriously depleted the pool of possible recruits for Newgarth University.

In line with the general trend at Newgarth University, its business school had been experiencing declining enrolments in the years leading up to the millennium. It was greatly disadvantaged at an early stage by the population movement pattern mentioned previously. Early in 2001, a new business plan was devised in an attempt to keep the school viable. The focus of this plan was the development of institutional partnerships. The name "institutional partnership" is actually a misnomer in this case and quite misleading. The relationship with partner institutions envisaged by Newgarth University, although it resembled a franchise arrangement, was in fact a joint venture. Now, I realise that to the reader that this seems a little pedantic and "nit-picky", but when attempting to teach business structures to students, it is very difficult to explain that the institution which is teaching them actually has the organisational names and structures wrong. As an academic teaching business law, this misnaming was an ongoing source of personal frustration.

To get back to the business plan, it is important to emphasise that Newgarth University had the legal authority to bestow degrees, which the partner institutions (at that time) did not. This authority was given by the state government in legislation that created the university. It is doubtful that the legislation intended for the university to create such a business plan; however, it was not prohibited. This new business plan made it clear that Newgarth University was not only a place for the pursuit and development of knowledge but was also now a manufacturer. It was the creator and provider of an education product that was much the same as any other marketable product. The product that was being offered was a degree (there were several degrees offered), which had been appropriately accredited by a recognised Australian university. Each unit of each degree was packaged as a product that could be delivered by staff at Newgarth University or by staff of the partner institutions at their campuses. As a minimum, the package for each unit was to contain:

- A unit outline

  This provides all the relevant administrative information the candidate would need to know in order to navigate the unit. The unit outline would also specify the set text for the unit and the required readings.

- Lecture materials

  These were normally in the form of PowerPoint presentations. Some lecture materials were a composite part of the computer programs the students were using such as Mind Your Own Business (MYOB). Mind Your Own Business provided its own lecture sessions and tutorials. Many textbook publishers now provide online lecture presentation and tutorials to accompany a given text. I preferred to provide the students with PowerPoint presentation handouts and fully written lecture notes for each module. The lecture notes had lists of

further references for students who wished to explore the topics further. The comprehensive lecture notes provided the information needed for students to complete their written assignments.

- Tutorial questions

  These would be provided for the 10 weeks of tutorials and for one week of revision work. In most cases, the tutorial questions were provided by the textbook authors. The questions were invariably the same each semester.

- Assessment tasks

  - Each unit's assessment regime tended to be different due to the nature of the topics and how each unit was presented. The minimum assessment required was a research essay and a final exam. I personally preferred to set a small assessment task at Week 4 to identify any students at risk of failing and then a research essay at Week 9 to enable feedback to be given in a timely fashion prior to the final examination.

  - For each assessment task there was required to be a different deferred or supplementary assessment task (for use when a student was unable to attend or attempt the first due to illness or other humanitarian grounds). A special assessment task was also required to be composed. The special assessment task was used when a student applied for special consideration and was required to sit or re-sit an assessment. Thus, each unit required nine pieces of assessment per teaching period: three ordinary assessment tasks, three supplementary assessment tasks and three special assessment tasks.

- A learning management system

  All the material that the student needed, apart from research readings and the set text, was made available on the learning management system page for each unit.

- Moderation

  - For each assessment task, the coordinator of the unit was to provide an assessment rubric to help the students as well as a marking guide to help markers external to Newgarth University, such as teaching staff at partner institutions or sessional markers. A sample of all assessments submitted (either 10 samples or 10% of all samples submitted by students at Newgarth University and each of the partner institutions, whichever was the greater) was to be delivered to the unit coordinator for checking to ensure that the

marking had been conducted in accordance with the unit's objectives and the coordinator's standards. The samples were randomly selected. This was to ensure that there was marking consistency across all seven partner institutions and the home campus.

- In the event that a coordinator discovered that a sample had not been marked accurately or consistently, the coordinator would insist that one of the following occur:
    - All assignments from the source of the samples be remarked by either the relevant lecturer or another marker.
    - That a second opinion on the accuracy or inconsistently of marking be obtained from another appropriate Newgarth University staff member.
    - That the marks awarded by different markers (due to the volume of marking and time constraints, there may be several markers for each offering of a unit) be scaled to create equivalence across partner institutions.
    - That the coordinator re-mark all inaccurate and or inconsistent assignments.
- The coordinator was then required to attend the examiners' meeting at the end of the semester to defend the course of action taken. The examiners' meeting could ratify the semester's results or change them.

In effect, everything a student needed to know in order to pass a unit was packaged up in a transportable product form. This system was modelled on a similar system employed by a number of universities in various regions of India and in their feeder colleges (Ministry Of Human Development, 2015).

In 2005, the new business plan of Newgarth University's Business School was put into action. The courses, as products, were packaged and licensed to seven non-chartered, non-self-assessing, higher education providers who were referred to as partner institutions. The agreement between Newgarth University and the various partner institutions, in the form of a contract, outlined the respective obligations of the parties. It required that the course materials be presented at the partner institutions in an equivalent manner and method to that employed at Newgarth University.

The term "equivalence" is one that had been used extensively by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) to indicate that programs delivered by non-university higher education providers on behalf of self-accrediting institutions must provide the same level of instruction as would be provided by the self-accrediting institution – for an example, see the AUQA audit of Insearch Ltd (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2009). It became evident in the early stages of Newgarth University's partner agreement that the partner institutions were not providing equivalence and were beset by administrative, pedagogical, political, and ethical problems as discussed below (AUQA, 2009).

Administrative difficulties were apparent from the outset. Administrative and academic costing for the packaged units was badly miscalculated. It had been assumed by Newgarth University management that the packaged units could simply be taken off the shelf and given to the partner institutions, who would teach them in their entirety and unchanged to their students. It was assumed that only one package was needed as one size would fit all. The reality was that the partners' business plans conflicted with that of Newgarth University. For example, I observed that many students did not attend class until three or four weeks after the start of the semester. I asked the students who arrived late in the semester why this was the case? Anecdotally the general reply was some of the partner institutions' international recruiting agents in various countries were able to buy air travel tickets at a large discount if bought in bulk and for an off-peak time. These agents were buying air tickets for the off-peak time, which was three to four weeks after the normal start of the semester in Australian universities. By doing this, attractive discounts for package deals, which included fees, flights, and accommodation, could be offered to international students. This meant that students who accepted the offer of cheaper travel often arrived in Australia after the "census date" for withdrawal from courses and often missed the first assessment. In terms of progression notification to the Australian immigration department, these students were classed as being at risk of failing before they had actually arrived in the country. This type of action caused concern and was questioned by the Victorian Taskforce on Overseas Students' Education Experiences (Baird, 2010; Dept of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, 2008). A Four corners report published in 2015 on overseas education agents calculates that over $1 billion has been paid in commissions to such agents. (Besser, Cronau & Cohen, 2015)

To obtain the best financial benefit of these deals, and to coincide with the late arrival of many international students, each of the seven partner institutions modified their academic calendars to stagger the start of their teaching semesters to different times from those used by Newgarth University. Different starting dates meant that assessment tasks were due at different times at each of the different partner institutions. Ensuring integrity of the assessment tasks required that each assessment task set for each of the campuses had to be different in order to prevent students at one institution providing feedback to students at another institution with a later start date. The effect of this was that rather than one packaged unit being prepared and licensed by Newgarth University, seven packages, a separate one for each start date, were required to ensure the credibility of the assessment tasks.

There was an internal policy requirement that the coordinators of the Newgarth University units were to provide three general assessment tasks per unit. This policy also required that supplementary assessment tasks (to be used under certain circumstances when students failed an original assessment) and special assessment tasks (which are used when students are eligible for special consideration due to ill health or other personal reasons) be provided. That is a total of nine assessment tasks. These had to be replicated for each of the seven partner institutions, which required the preparation of 72 different assessment tasks. It was normal for a lecturer at Newgarth University to coordinate three courses a semester. Under these conditions, a coordinator was required to provide 216 separate assessment tasks per semester. For example: commercial law required three assessment tasks – a short test in Week 4, a research essay in Week 9 and a final exam Week 12. A summary of the requirements of a packaged course's assessment tasks are detailed in Table 1.

*Table 1*

Summary of a Packaged Course's Assessment Tasks

| Assessment task | NU | Partner A | Partner B | Partner C | Partner D | Partner E | Partner F | Partner G | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A short test in Week 4, plus supplementary and special | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 24 |
| A research essay in Week 9 plus supplementary and special | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 24 |
| Final exam week 12+ plus supplementary and special | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 24 |
| Total | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 72 |

If this pattern is repeated for the company law and introduction to legal studies units, it is easy to see that a coordinator of three units was required to provide 216 separate assessment tasks per semester, which equates to 648 per year.

A Newgarth University coordinator prepares their own unit/course assessment tasks plus rubric and marking guide for on-campus students at Newgarth, then prepares numerous variations and alternative tasks for students at the partner institutions because of the contingencies explained. An ordinary full-time lecturer/coordinator is employed for 1610 hours per year. This means that only 2.48 hours can be allocated to construct and write a unit/course guide, assessment tasks, rubrics and marking guides, on the proviso that the lecturer/coordinator does no other academic work. The workloads of the academics were underestimated by a minimum of 75 per cent and this was without course design costs, marking costs, moderation and administration costs taken into account. Financially, the Newgarth University Business School was operating at an unsustainable level and at a substantial loss.

The packaged units also had political and ethical shortcomings. The product was originally designed for a cohort of domestic students who were undertaking a fast-tracked professional degree in accounting. As coordinator of the business law components, I was to provide units in commercial law as stipulated by the Australian Chartered Professional Accountants Association (CPA), which is charged with ensuring the professional standards of Australian accountancy courses. The legal components of the degree were comparable with a Master of Law degree, which would usually be undertaken by students with an undergraduate law degree.

The academic thresholds, which had been set for the law subjects, were of a very high standard to ensure that students who were being fast-tracked would acquire the professional qualifications required by employers. These standards proved to be unrealistically high for a cohort of international students in a discipline to which most of them had never before been introduced. Language ability was also a factor for these students. The Victorian Ombudsman's office was concerned as to the ability of some international students to communicate in English despite having apparently passed an

appropriate English language proficiency examination before admission (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011, p. 5).

The Ombudsman's report identified that his office had obtained internal documents from three universities indicating that business considerations had been factored into discussions about admission policies (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011, p. 7). While most of the international cohort at the partner institutions possessed a good conversational "street" understanding of the English language, few had sufficient facility to understand specific legal language with its historical Latin, French, and Anglo-Saxon origins.

The Masters law units built upon a student's presumed prior knowledge and learning from bachelor's degrees and effectively excluded those who did not have a substantial academic grounding in the Australian legal system. To further protect the integrity of the profession, the CPA would not accredit any Newgarth University unit that was not physically being taught at the home campus. The international students undertaking the Master of Professional Accounting (MPA) would not be able to obtain recognition in Australia as accountants on graduation. It is possible that students undertaking the course hoped to be recognised as accountants in other countries, and I have found no evidence to suggest that the degree would not be recognised elsewhere internationally.

It would seem that it was a questionable ethical practice to market this degree to international students as a professional degree to be undertaken at Newgarth University's partner institutions when it would not be recognised by that profession. Prima facie, this would appear to be in breach of the then *Trade Practices Act 1976* (repealed). However, the degree comfortably met the requirements of the international student visa legislation, the 2007 version of the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education (The *ESOS Act 2000*), and the immigration requirements for permanent residency if the students were able to pass the degree.

#### 4.2.1 Interrelationship between the partners and Newgarth University.

The relationship between the partners and Newgarth University could be described, in legal terms, as a simple contract conducted at arm's length. A standard partner institution contract, together with a document outlining partner and parent institution obligations, was developed by Newgarth University's legal office. The contract required that there be a replication of the physical resources available at Newgarth University at each partner institution. These included library resources, online materials, and facilities for pastoral care. The teaching model to be used was that of a moderation process. Figure 4 in Chapter 1 is a diagrammatic representation of this moderation process.

To ensure the fidelity of the curriculum and materials being taught at the partner institutions, both the units' intermediate assessments and the final examinations were organised and moderated by Newgarth University staff. The contractual requirement of there being a duplicate online learning management system at each of the partner institutions meant that there was no facility available for coordinators to electronically monitor students' progress at partner institutions via the reporting systems available in an LMS (see the reports in Figure 23 and Figure 24 on Blackboard report for course item usage). The partner institutions' system was not an LMS, so it was unable to generate such reports. Newgarth University lecturers/coordinators were also not given access to the I-drive facility at the partner institutions. The I-drive also had no facility for a genuinely randomised selection of moderation scripts as there would have been had the assignments been submitted via an LMS such as Blackboard.

Instead of a randomised selection of scripts, the moderation samples became a representative example of fail grades (less than 49%), passing grades (between 50% and 60%), and higher grades (75% and higher) chosen by the marker. Where inconsistencies in marking at the partner institutions occurred, it usually led to applications being made by Newgarth University staff to the Head of the Business School for permission to have the scripts independently marked by an external marker, or for reallocation of duties so that the coordinators could re-mark the scripts themselves due to the already high workloads.

The teaching materials for the relevant units at partner institutions were to be "equivalent" to those used at Newgarth University. This was one of the areas in which the partnerships encountered interpretation difficulties. "Equivalent" does not mean "the same as." Thus, extensive debates were held amongst the law discipline staff at Newgarth University as to what materials were required to be provided to the partners. One colleague, who had received national accolades for teaching, refused to provide teaching materials to staff at the partner institutions for fear that they would lose moral rights as author of this material. Legally, any materials produced by employed academics at Newgarth University were not the property of the academic author but of Newgarth University. However, under the *Copyright Amendment (Moral Rights) Act 2000*, the university can only use the materials as intended by the author. As long as these rights are not reassigned, the author can prevent the university using the materials in any way that could negatively impact upon the author's reputation. The legal argument that was put forward for this particular academic was that under the arrangement with Newgarth University's partners, the material they had provided would be used at institutions where the CPA was not willing to endorse the quality of the teaching provided. The academic claimed that as an as an award-winning teacher the use of her materials in such a situation would have a negative impact on her reputation and future career prospects. The academic did, however, produce an abridged substitute version of materials. This refusal of the Newgarth University academic to cooperate in sharing teaching materials caused great consternation at one partner institution.

A sessional lecturer teaching the unit at a Melbourne partner institution refused to use any of the substitute materials provided by Newgarth University on the grounds that they were substandard and inferior to those being provided at Newgarth University. The sessional lecturer, instead, taught from a textbook that he had written some years previously. Due to the lack of an LMS, the problem was only identified in the final moderation process. The sessional lecturer was marking assignments as correct when the students gave him the answers that he had taught them; the coordinator was marking these same answers as incorrect. Appeals were made to the Education Ombudsman's office by several students. The Ombudsman's office advised that the students could only be assessed on what they had been taught, which thereby rendered the unit coordinator's work void and confirmed the CPA's misgivings about the credibility of those units not taught on the Newgarth University home campus.

In an effort to contain the blowout of workloads of Newgarth University academics caused by the knock-on effects of different start dates at the various partners, and to contain costs, Newgarth University required all partner institutions to synchronise their teaching periods. This was achieved by ingenious timetable scheduling. A standard academic term in 2007 was 13 weeks, with a one-week mid-term break and a one-week study break prior to the examination period of two weeks – 17 weeks in all.

In order to accommodate the request of the partner institutions' recruiting agents to be able to buy cheaper airfares (which they on-sold to students at a profit) after the start of the normal Australian academic year, Newgarth University reduced the partner institutions' academic term to 12 weeks. It

also removed the mid-term break and examination study period. These changes to the teaching schedule enabled the teaching period to begin three weeks later at the partner institutions than at the Newgarth University campus. The assessment regime was set so that no assessment was conducted prior to the mid-term break that was still scheduled at the Newgarth University campus. This timing of the first assessment task enabled the assessment regime for Newgarth University and the partner institutions to be synchronised, while still giving the recruiting agents the ability to buy bulk cheap fares for prospective students.

The revised schedule also resulted in a huge reduction in the academic workload of Newgarth University staff. The synchronised timing of the assessments at all institutions negated the need to provide individual assessments at each institution. (See table 1) The result was a reduction from seventy-two assessment to just nine needed. However, the impact on students at the partner institutions was negative. In many cases, despite the later start of the semester at the partner institutions, students were still arriving in Week three of the revised teaching schedule (which corresponded to Week six of the Newgarth University semester). The Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce (Victoria) (OSEETV) (Dept of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, 2008a) felt that this was apparently due to advice given to students by the academic agents. With the removal of study weeks, these students were starting a unit very late with absolutely no opportunity to catch up. Standard 9.5 of the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students specifies that the length of the course that international students undertake must not differ from that of a domestic student, but does not specify that the individual units, of which the course is comprised, must be the same as those taken by domestic students. The question of the "equivalence" of units delivered on campus at Newgarth University and the versions delivered at the partner institutions was addressed by ensuring that the international students had the same face-to-face contact hours as the domestic students.

The OSEETV found that Indian students who came to study in Victoria expected that in keeping with the norm in India, all written materials would be provided for them (Dept of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, 2008). The students I taught at partner institutions were not prepared and could not afford to buy textbooks. The set texts for the law units were quite expensive. A discounted combination package of text from the publisher could be in the region of $350 per unit. It was, however, possible to buy very good, but unlawful, pirated reproductions of the textbooks in a Sydney suburb for only a few dollars. These pirated texts were banned from open-book examinations, as the university could not knowingly condone illegal activities. This caused several appeals to the student discipline appeals committee on the interpretation of "open book." In the 2007–08 period, the libraries at the partner institutions were rudimentary and carried a limited number of copies of the set text, which were invariably on close reserve, so they could not be taken from the libraries.

As mentioned previously, the partner institutions did not use an LMS. While materials would be posted on Newgarth's LMS (Blackboard), which all students were able to gain access to, the posting of online materials at the partner institutions was at the discretion of the sessional teacher at each of the institutions. If online materials were provided at all, they were usually in the form of PowerPoint presentations, which were produced by the coordinators at Newgarth University and sent by email or USB to the lecturers at the partner institutions. The PowerPoint presentations were to have been placed on the partner institutions' LMS by their sessional lecturers because the Newgarth unit coordinators did not have access to the partners' resources. However, this was rarely done as most of the sessional lecturers at the partner institutions had little technical knowledge, very tight time restraints, and usually did not follow the PowerPoint presentation. This left the students with very little, useable study material. There were constant requests from the partner institutions for the unit coordinators at Newgarth to provide comprehensive study guides, which would include details of all

the required reading for the unit. The response to the requests was the development of a CD Rom for each unit by academics in the Newgarth University Business School, which was given to all students at the partner institutions. The CD Rom contained the administrative material for the relevant unit such as timetables, exam rules, and university rules on plagiarism, and as a minimum, the PowerPoint presentations for the semester. However, copyright restriction prevented readings and other study material being reproduced.

The instances of plagiarism and academic misconduct at the partner institutions were of such a proportion that it was seen as necessary for Newgarth University to appoint a specialist plagiarism officer. This person's job was to attend the partner institutions and hear student appeals against staff claims of plagiarism and academic misconduct. The Newgarth University misconduct rules are regulations made under the authority of the Newgarth University Act, which was enacted by state legislature at the time of Newgarth University's foundation. This Act makes plagiarism a legal offence and, as such, a breach of the associated regulation is capable of revoking a student's visa to study in Australia. Under the university's misconduct rules, a student found guilty of plagiarism, or other forms of cheating, will lose marks for an assignment or may even be excluded from the course. Plagiarism is considered a very serious offence, which can prevent graduates in some professions (such as law and accounting) from being able to practise (Lindsay, 2011).

It is difficult at times to determine whether apparent plagiarism was committed accidently or was deliberate, or what may have occurred was due to the ignorance of academic requirements on the part of a student. The outcome for a student accused of plagiarism was usually that the student failed the unit. As is elaborated on in the next section, a failed unit could cause serious financial hardship for a student. In the case of international students at the partner institutions, it was my experience that those accused of plagiarism would sometimes close ranks and refuse to attend hearings. This resulted in all of them being penalised under the university's rules.

The university's misconduct rules required that anyone who was complicit in a case of plagiarism or misconduct would be treated as if they had committed the plagiarism or misconduct themselves. Thus, if a student allows another student to copy their work, both are deemed equally guilty of plagiarism and misconduct. This meant that if several students submitted the same work, all would be penalised. It was my personal experience as a plagiarism officer that in such cases it was common for the students, or staff at the partner institution on their behalf, to appeal to the Ombudsman's office. The University's misconduct rule was usually overturned by the Ombudsman's office on the grounds that the penalty would cause excessive hardship for the student. (In my term as plagiarism officer, I personally knew only of one appeal to the Ombudsman's office that was not upheld). With Newgarth University having institutions in several states, several Ombudsman's offices were involved. The Victorian Ombudsman's office did not disclose records of complaints for privacy reasons. However, the 2011 Victorian Ombudsman's report, *Investigation into how universities deal with International students,* quotes at para 241, a senior academic from Deakin University who said:

> We have hundreds and hundreds of students in the faculty… who are before the faculty academic discipline boards… Literally, I mean 1,500 maybe at times overall in a trimester. I don't know what the figures are, but they are just massive.

Hardship was not a defence that was available under Newgarth University rules and therefore was not an element to be considered when assessing guilt. The Ombudsman's office, however, can suggest that regulations such as the University's rule be waived in cases of hardship. The conflict this kind of outcome created between Newgarth University and the partner institutions was immense. The University was under an obligation to protect the credibility and validity of its assessments, yet

its credibility was regularly threatened by staff at the partner institutions who actively encouraged their international students to appeal to the Ombudsman on humanitarian grounds.

In one instance I observed, I was required (under the University's examination rules) to attend an examination for the reading period. The examination was stopped 10 minutes after it had commenced at all of the partner institutions, when a student at the institution I was attending complained that the exam was different to the one being conducted simultaneously at another partner institution. It should not have been possible for that student to know such a fact unless the student had been involved in some form of academic misconduct. Hence the exam was discontinued and rescheduled.

A class action (a complaint involving several people for the same grievance) regarding the hardship of rescheduling the examination was made to the Ombudsman's office by the partner institutions involved. The premise of their complaint against the rescheduling of the exam was that as many international students return home for the semester breaks, the exam should not be rescheduled until the following semester. The partner institutions also complained that the students without knowing the grade they received for the exam could not progress in their courses, and this would create serious financial hardship for them. This complaint was upheld, and all students enrolled in the unit, regardless of location, were awarded a pass. This appeal to the Ombudsman's office and the subsequent ruling placed Newgarth University staff and staff at partner institutions in complete opposition to each other. Students who could easily have passed the unit were awarded an aggregate pass, which reduced their grade point average. The Ombudsman's ruling resulted in a low average grade for the unit. Under the Business School's "traffic-light" system for identifying poor performing units, the unit was awarded an amber mark to identify a unit at risk of falling below a satisfactory academic level, which subsequently reduced the recorded academic performance of the staff members involved. In effect, the Newgarth University academics involved in the course were penalised for the student misconduct. These examples and similar events reduced the working relationship between the staff at Newgarth University and the partner institutions to ongoing conflict and, at times open hostility.

#### 4.2.2 Relationship between the teaching institutions and the students.

The relationship between the students at the partner institutions and Newgarth University appeared to be based on nothing more than a revenue-generating arrangement in which the students provided the income. Prior to late 2008, many international students were unaware that they were not bound to the one institution and could change to another higher-education institution (Baird, 2010; Victorian Auditor-General, 2009). The OSEETV, the Review of Education Services for Overseas Students, and the Victorian Auditor General's report regarding international students (Victorian Auditor-General, 2009) were all critical of the misinformation often given to international students by higher-education providers and their agents, as well as the concealing of information in relation to students' options for changing institutions. The Victorian Government was especially critical of Newgarth University and its partners for providing such misinformation (Baird, 2010; Victorian Auditor-General, 2009). The release of the first of the reports mentioned in 2008 made it publicly known that international students could enrol at any institution that offered the same degree in a face-to-face delivery mode. The release of these reports resulted in the following three events occurring:

- The Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) review (Baird, 2010) made recommendations that the ESOS Act be changed to ensure that marketing and services

offered by Australian educational providers fell within the ambit of the *Trade Practices Act 1974* (Cth) (TPA) and could be enforced by the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission. (This move effectively confirmed that degrees were products and that universities provided services to consumers. This point was specified in the Australian consumer law legislation which replaced the TPA in 2010).

- The partner institutions applied to AUQA (as it was then) to be able to offer their own degrees.
- Newgarth University's partner institutions also formed partnerships with other institutions, so that they could offer alternative degrees to Newgarth University's MPA.

With competition now available to international students enrolled at Newgarth's partner institutions, the international students who had been recruited by the partner institutions could to some extent "degree shop" to attain the degree that was most suitable for them. The students could now go elsewhere if they were not passing units, and, in the case of Partner C and Partner D, they could change universities but stay in the same institution. This situation forced the hand of Newgarth University, which conducted a review of the product and services that were being offered through its partner institutions.

By mid-2008, the reports of the misinformation (Baird, 2010; Victorian Auditor-General, 2009) were being reproduced in places such as Mumbai (Indiatimes, 2009). The circulation of these reports may have contributed to the general decline in applications for visas from students wishing to enrol at Australian universities including Newgarth. Figure 17 is a graphical representation of international student visa applications to study in Australia lodged and granted between the financial years 2006–07 and 2010–11. The decline in 2008 coincided with reports in the India Times of misinformation and unconscionable conduct by Australian education providers against Indian students.

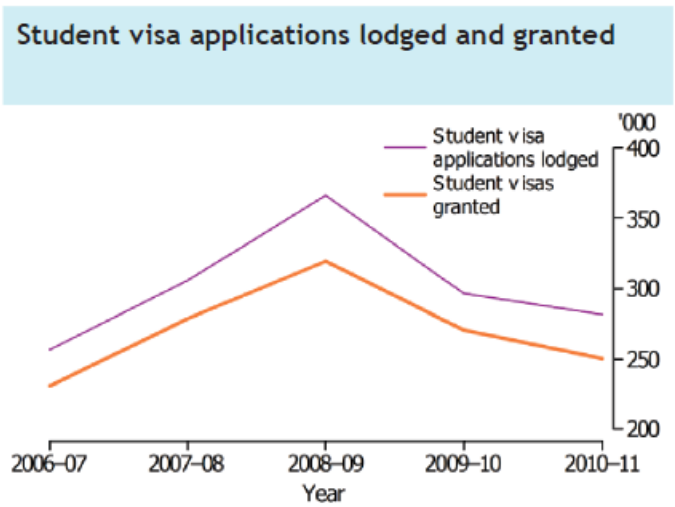



*Figure 14.* Student visa applications 2006–11. *(Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011)*

From my own experience, there was a noted improvement from 2009–10 in the way that students were treated at all the partner institutions I was involved in. There was a greater investment in resources for the students and a much more proactive attitude from Newgarth University towards the pastoral care and welfare of the students. It is not possible to pinpoint the exact reason why this change in attitude occurred; however, it did occur after the damning reports from the Victorian Government (Baird, 2010; Dept Of Innovation Industry And Regional Development, 2008; Victorian Auditor-General, 2009), AUQA (AUQA, 2009) and the Victorian Education Ombudsman (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011) and coincided with a very active and vocal cohort of students.

## 4.3 Establishing the Case Study

I was approached late in 2006 by the management of the Business School who had concerns about the very high failure rates in the law units at the partner institutions. This approach was a result of the work I had previously undertaken in New Zealand. At this time, I was appointed to Newgarth University in order to evaluate the law programs and implement corrective strategies at the partner institutions. My appointment commenced at the start of Semester 1 in March, 2007.

By 2007, the Business School's partnership arrangements were well established. There were four main domestic partners. Two partners had campuses in each of two cities. Details are as follows:

- Partners A, B and C were Melbourne based.
- Partner C also had a campus in Sydney.
- Partner D was Sydney based and had a campus in Adelaide.

A further partnership was created in Adelaide in 2008 although this institution did not form part of the study.

The Business School had other partnerships, which either only ran for one semester a year or were themselves providers for other overseas universities. There were other partnerships that had similar arrangements with other schools at Newgarth University. These other partnerships were not, however, within the ambit of this study.

It had been established by staff at Newgarth University, prior to my arrival in 2007, that many of the students at the partner institutions had difficulty performing academically in the law discipline. In March 2007, the staff of the Business School had noted that there were apparent inconsistencies between three of the partner institutions, which were geographically located within a few hundred metres of each other in the Melbourne CBD. At the Partner A institution, the pass rates were acceptable, although student grades were not high. At Partner B, the pass rate was 100 per cent; however, the moderation samples were continuously being sent back by the moderators at Newgarth University to the markers at Partner B for awarding grades that were considered too high. At the third and largest partner institution, Partner C, the failure rate was 100 per cent. Each of these three partners specifically targeted and recruited their students from different parts of Asia. These were respectively Hong Kong/China (Partner A), Sri Lanka (Partner B), and Nepal/India. The diagnosis of the problem by the then Head of the law (HOL) discipline at Newgarth University was that:

- Students were performing well on Newgarth University's campus, so the materials must be okay.

- The students performed relatively well at one partner institution, which indicated that the system was working, so there was no systemic problem. This was corroborated by the moderation samples being returned to Partner B.

- The students at the partner institutions, according to anecdotal evidence, were working many hours in paid employment, which detracted from their studies; thus, their studies were not their main priority and the results indicated this.

- Many of the Indian students, in particular, often complained about the academic demands on them and indicated that they wanted only to "buy" their degrees for the purpose of obtaining permanent residency in Australia. This belief was supported by the disparity between the marks of the students at Partner C and the Chinese students at Partner A who, in general, appeared to be more studious.

[Adapted from minutes of law discipline meeting memo distributed to MPA teaching team]

The conclusion drawn by the HOL discipline was that many of the Indian students at the partner institutions were under the misapprehension that Newgarth University would provide them with a degree simply for attendance. Moreover, the Head concluded, many students assumed that provided they paid their fees they would gain the required points for permanent residency in Australia according to the immigration rules that were applicable in 2007 [Adapted from minutes of law discipline meeting memo distributed to MPA teaching team]. One interesting aspect of this conclusion was that the HOL, a 20-year veteran of the university, was vehemently opposed to the arrangements with partner institutions and would have preferred to retain the university purely as a regional and rural learning centre. The HOL had never visited any of the partner institutions and refused to do so.

**4.3.1 The students' social situation.** In April 2007, the Head of the Business School, who had employed me, moved to another university. The evaluation of the law units offered at the partner institutions that I was working on was immediately suspended under the direction of the HOL. The direction given by the HOL to *all* members of the law discipline, myself included, was to continue working with the partner institutions as had been done in the past and to take no further remedial action. Following discussions with the representatives of the partner institutions at the examiners' meeting in October 2007, an invitation was extended to me to visit all the partners. The representatives of the partner institutions advised the new incoming Head of the Business School that there might be a different interpretation of the difficulties experienced by students to that expressed by the HOL. I was given a new mandate by the incoming Head to evaluate the partner institutions' claims and recommend solutions to the ongoing problem of high student failure rates.

From my visits to the partner institutions I made the following observations:

The students at Partner A in 2007 were mainly Chinese, with some students from eastern European and Russian Federation states. The institution was operated by overseas Chinese interests and had a large number of Chinese administrators, instructors and tutors. Partner A was a well-established training institution that had been operating for many years, focusing mainly on the hospitality

industry, and only extending its training to include business courses in 2006. There was an established student intranet and good facilities, and student pastoral care was a very high priority. The students were well provided for and were encouraged to excel.

Partner B was a small, new institution that had been established by a business graduate of Newgarth University, who had obtained funding from Sri Lanka. At the time of the study, Partner B was housed in a most unsuitable suite of old offices, where there were no dedicated teaching areas or facilities. There was no library or intranet, and the majority of the tutors were law and business students from other universities in the city.

Partner C was a large company (initially a private family company) with premises in two capital cities and options from Newgarth University to operate in two further capital cities when the expansion could be made possible. The premises were large and technically well equipped. They had excellent lecture rooms and very good tutorial spaces. Computer laboratories were available for the students. Initially there was little in the way of student relaxation facilities and library resources in Melbourne, though these facilities were excellent in Sydney. The student intranet was, in reality, a shared drive on the institution's mainframe computer network, with each student restricted to a weekly internet allocation. These student facilities in Melbourne were very much improved over time.

Partner D was very similar to Partner C. It also had two campuses in major capital cities and was a large firm with international resources. It also acted as a partner institution for other universities. Partner D provided good teaching spaces with adequate technical resources but limited library resources. There was also very little provided in the way of pastoral care or student facilities.

The students at Newgarth University's home campus and at Partner A's premises were, in the main, quite satisfied with the MPA program. They had good pastoral care and support, adequate facilities, and they generally performed well, or at least well enough to justify the expense of their tertiary education.

The students at Partner B appeared, in general, less satisfied. They did not appear to have good facilities or pastoral care support. A lecturer at Partner B contacted me to express concern that he was being pressured into granting passing grades for students who were not achieving them. The lecturer and I held discussions where we jointly assessed the students' assessment submissions and both of us agreed on the standard of marking and moderation. The lecturer and I, as coordinator, both found that the majority of students from Partner B were not attaining the required academic standard.

These results were taken to the relevant examiners' meeting where they were ratified by that meeting. It transpired that some students' marks from Partner B were scaled up to achieve pass rates in a meeting that was held after the examiners' meeting. This meeting was held between representatives of Partner B and the executive of Newgarth University. The meeting was not held at the Business School, no representatives from the school were present, and nor was my consultation as coordinator sought. I was not allowed an appeal to the University Academic Board to protest the changes of grades. My appeal was denied on the grounds that once the examiners' meeting had been concluded, the matter became an administrative one, not academic.

I attempted to talk to the students at Partner B. Most were unwilling to discuss their experiences. One student, who I casually engaged in conversation while waiting for a train, told me that many students were too frightened to say anything to anyone about what had occurred at the institution. This student said that he and his fellow students understood that they were receiving pass grades for incomplete work:

> … but it is a means to an end. I don't care as long as I get a pass. How PR [permanent residency] is achieved is irrelevant… No one is going to speak up. Who is going to put their PR at risk for the sake of an institution who took no responsibility to the students? (Anonymous student, Partner B)

It appeared that the mainly Sri Lankan students at Partner B also felt intimidated by the institution. They were aware that they were underperforming, yet they were getting passes where other students at other institutions were failing. The Partner B students were not going to make complaints. They refused to speak to anyone in case their awarded marks were taken from them.

The situation at Partner C was somewhat different. This was a family-owned company, which appeared to have seen an opportunity to make money by appealing to the desires of people from their Nepalese homeland to achieve Australian qualifications and residency. They saw a niche market and exploited it. The premises of Partner C in both capital cities were large and refitted in a modern and tasteful décor with good technical resources. The staff areas were good, which provided adequate interview spaces for staff–student consultations. Having dealt with the middle-management staff, I found them to be experienced, well trained, friendly and dedicated to the students.

The first impressions I gained on visiting Partner C was that this was a money-making exercise, which presented a strong corporate image. The décor was plush but business like and advertising was subtle and effective. The brochures for both prospective students and current students were plentiful, informative, and easy to read. My experience of the operational efficiency was that it was tight and trimmed to the bone. Management was tough and effective, but the operation ran like a very well-oiled machine. The institution conveyed the impression that it could provide good education in a no-nonsense manner. One quite disturbing observation I made at Partner C was that the students at both campuses were very suspicious of anyone from Newgarth University, and many students failed to understand the connection between Newgarth University and Partner C. Many students initially did not realise that they were, in fact, Newgarth University students.

Partner D was a long-established training institution, much like Partner A. Its area of expertise had been as an English language college. Partner D also had campuses in two capital cities. I noted in my very early connections with this partner institution that a change in managers significantly changed the performance of both campuses. In its Sydney institution, a new manager was employed late in 2007. This manager had a much more dynamic and progressive approach, creating a vibrant institution with a good positive attitude from both staff and students. By comparison, in Adelaide, a change in managers late in 2007 saw a number of good teaching and administration staff leave. Student performances plummeted in a very short time. Many students transferred to other institutions. The change almost brought what had previously been a progressive and vibrant campus to a standstill.

At the time, I commenced employment at Newgarth University, it had no regular visitation program to meet students or staff at the partner institutions. At an examiners' meeting, the academic directors from Partners A, C and D explained that the only time a representative of Newgarth University would be in contact with the students from the partners was during plagiarism and academic conduct hearings. In such situations, the students were usually heavily penalised. I was one of the very few Newgarth staff to visit the partners, and possibly the only one to contact the students in relation to their teaching and learning.

During these visits to both the Sydney and Melbourne campus of Partner C, I observed a very serious "them and us" conflict. Both the students and staff at the institutions appeared to resent any

intervention from Newgarth University. This created a situation where it seemed that neither party was attempting to address the underlying interests of the other. The them and us situation was compounded by the lecturers at the institutions who told me that they did not agree with the materials provided by Newgarth University staff and usually did not teach to them. The students had not previously seen anyone in authority from Newgarth University and the only information which was passed to them was via Partner C's own lecturers and tutors, who were often at odds with the Newgarth University coordinators and, according to the students, constantly made this point abundantly clear to them.

Unlike Newgarth University's domestic students, there were no elected student representatives at Partner C who could take matters to the lecturers and coordinators. I observed on several occasions that this situation made the students very suspicious of Newgarth staff. When a problem arose, the students would try to see me as a group, which often created a positional standpoint for the students. When meetings were organised, the students would not attend unless there were several students together. In these meetings, the students' viewpoints were carefully rehearsed, with each student having exactly the same things to say.

It was evident that they were creating an intricate student allegiance group, which requires further explanation. There were three main elements to the context within which the student allegiance group was formed, and each of these is further discussed. The elements were the students' social circumstances, the interrelationship between Partner C and Newgarth University, and the interrelationship between the teaching institutions and the students.

In examining Partner C as an example of the partnership arrangement, it is necessary to give a brief overview. I am focusing on the period around 2007 and at that time, the majority of students were Indian and Nepalese at Partner C. Most of the evidential material in the form of reports I refer to in this section is from the 2008–11 period that is referring to 2007. The report of the Victorian Government's taskforce on the Overseas Student Education Experience (2008a) suggests that at the time (2006–07), the Victorian economy, immigration and education were inextricably linked. The report indicates that the influx of Indian students increased rapidly from 30,000 in 2004 to 97,000 at the peak in 2009 (Verghese, 2009), with 45,000 of these students being in Melbourne (Verghese, 2009).

As has been previously noted, Partner C enrolled students mainly from India and Nepal. Baas (2009), in a survey of 130 Indian students in 2009, found only 14 who were not interested in obtaining permanent residency in Australia. From my own observations, it appeared that the majority of these students I had contact with wished to utilise their education in Australia as a pathway to permanent residency in this country. This pathway is both ethically and legally recognised by the Australian Government (Dept of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, 2008a).

The immigration situation in Australia in 2007 allowed permanent residency to be applied for by migrants if they could accumulate a number of "points" relevant to their application. The acceptable number of points for a possible successful application was between 110 and 120 (Wasem & Haddal, 2007). Certain skilled occupations and professions automatically gave their holders a sufficient number of points to apply for permanent residency in Australia with some degree of certainty. These are specified in the Skilled Occupations List (SOL) (Wasem & Haddal, 2007). Students studying to be accountants, lawyers and doctors, whose certifications were recognised in Australia, were, barring criminal convictions or being deemed national security risks, almost certain to be guaranteed permanent residency, which would enable them to live and work in Australia (Wasem & Haddal, 2007). The SOL is, in legal terms, only a *guideline*: guidelines do not carry as much legal and legislative authority as acts or regulations; however, failure to meet a standard in a legal guideline is

deemed failure to meet the requirements of the parent legislation. Guidelines may also be changed ministerially without parliamentary approval at any time.

Table 2 lists the desirable qualities, which were required for permanent residency in 2007. Each quality is given a numerical value, and the total of the score is required to be 110 or more. (Wasem & Haddal, 2007).

Table 2

Value Chart for Permanent Residency

| Factors | Points |
|---|---|
| Nominated occupation on the Skilled Occupations List (maximum 60 points): | |
| Highly sought skills | 60 |
| Very sought skills | 50 |
| Sought skills | 40 |
| Age (maximum 30 points): | |
| 18–29 | 30 |
| 30–34 | 25 |
| 35–44 | 20 |
| 39–44 | 15 |
| English language proficiency (maximum 20 points): | |
| Native English speaker, or | 20 |
| Gained a tertiary degree from a university where English is the primary language of instruction; or | 20 |
| Achieved a band score of at least 6 on all components of the international English language testing system (IELTS) test; or | 20 |
| Achieved a band score of at least 5 on all four components of the IELTS test | 15 |
| Specific work experience (maximum 10 points): | |
| Nominated occupation is worth 60 points and applicant worked in nominated occupation for at least the past three out of four years | 10 |
| Nominated occupation is worth 40, 50, or 60 points and applicant has worked in skilled employment (in any occupation on the SOL) for at least the past three out of four years | 5 |
| Employment offer/occupation in demand (maximum 20 points): | |
| Nominated occupation is found on the Migration Occupation in Demand list (MODL) | 15 |
| Nominated occupation is found on the MODL and applicant has a job offer in the nominated occupation from an Australian organisation that has employed at least 10 people on a full-time basis for the previous two fiscal years | 20 |
| Australian qualification (maximum 10 points): | |

| Factors | Points |
|---|---|
| At least a one-year diploma from an Australian university | 5 |
| A PhD (doctorate) from an Australian university | 10 |
| Spousal qualification (maximum 5 points): | |
| Spouse (or de facto spouse) meets all the basic requirements and is able to nominate an occupation from the SOL and has his/her qualification assessed as suitable for his/her nominated occupation | 5 |
| Other (maximum 5 points): | |
| Worked in Australia on a valid visa for at least 6 months out of the past 4 years in a skilled occupation (one found on the SOL) | 5 |
| Invested at least A$100,000 in a designated government investment in Australia for a term of at least 12 months | 5 |
| Fluent (to the level of professional interpreter/translator as set out by the National Australian Association of Translators and Interpreters) in one of Australia's community languages | 5 |

*Note.* From *Points System for Immigrant Selection: Options and Issues (pp. 25–26),* by R. E. Wasem and C. C. Haddal, 2007, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Services. Copyright 2007 by Congressional Research Services. Reprinted with permission.

Based on the points allocated in the list, a twenty-nine-year-old student who graduated with a degree (masters) from an Australian university with a highly sought skill set (such as accounting) would probably have one hundred fifteen points towards the one hundred twenty points that guaranteed permanent residency. An offer of a job included in the SOL occupation list would guarantee that person permanent residency. Any delay in obtaining the degree could be risky because permanent residency guidelines can be changed, and permanent residency could be denied.

A further difficulty was that the CPA (Certified Practising Accountant Association Australia) did not recognise the MPA (Master of Professional Accounting) offered by Newgarth University if it was delivered by a partner institution. Thus, the same degree offered by Newgarth University by two different methods had two different values. A degree obtained at Newgarth University's home campus is regarded as an accredited course for CPA membership. The same degree delivered by one of Newgarth's partners was not accredited. This discrepancy placed the students at the partner providers in a situation of being discriminated against by the very institution they choose to study with. The argument put forward by Newgarth University was that it was the educational provider, not the certifier. Certification was the responsibility of the CPA. It was the CPA who placed the restrictions on Newgarth University's partner providers. While there is no documentation available to confirm this point, the speculation was that the CPA had reservations regarding the quality of teaching at the partner institutions. If, based on the CPA's reservations, Newgarth University was knowingly providing the same degree course at different locations that were not academically equivalent, it would not have been meeting AUQA requirements that the course provided at partner institutions be equivalent to those at the home campus.

The students were paying $35,600 in fees to Newgarth University to study for their degree (this was an average figure, depending on credits allowed and possible extra ESOL classes based on the 2007 fees schedule, according to Newgarth University documents). They were also required to have sufficient funds to pay for two years' accommodation and their return airfares. Failing one of the

required law units could extend a student's stay by as much as a year. For example, the units in a degree are normally "staircased" to ensure that the student has gained the required skills in a first unit that will be required in a subsequent unit. This is achieved by imposing prerequisites as entry restrictions for higher-level units. Thus, a 200-level unit (second-year unit) will usually require that a 100-level unit (first-year unit) has been successfully completed. Should a student fail a 100-level unit, they must re-enrol and pass that unit before they can progress.

Several students at Partner C told me that they had passed all their accounting units but could not progress any further in their degree because they had not passed the first law unit. The immigration rules in 2007 were such that in order to stay in Australia on a student visa, the student could not just re-enrol for the 100-level law unit but must take a full academic study load regardless of the relevance of the study. To fail a unit could cost that student another full semester's fees to maintain a full study load or even a full year's tuition of eight units at approximately $17,000 in fees (dependent on enrolment) and probably double that in living expenses (Dept of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, 2008).

The disparity between the ability of the students at the Newgarth University home campus and at Partner C to gain recognition for the same degree led to understandable perceptions of racial discrimination amongst some of the students at the partner institutions. Racial discrimination has been documented as having had a very unsavoury effect on international students. In employment, they were often exploited (Dept of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, 2008a). In accommodation, they were often taken advantage of (Dept of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, 2008). Many students told me stories of working for $8 an hour or less (Arup, 2008; Rost, 2008) and of being forced to work in shops in exchange for basic accommodation (Arup, 2008). Other research reported that international students had been pressured to work twenty four-hour shifts in driving taxis (Rost, 2008) and as prostitutes in order to pay their way (Reilly, 2008). Students I spoke to told me that the perceptions of racial discrimination had caused them great stress. A great many of them feared falling behind in their studies due to the amount of paid work they had to perform in order to survive in the cities. They blamed this on discrimination. Some resorted to unethical means in order to gain more time for study before assessments.

For example, unfortunately at one of the partner institutions in Melbourne that I had dealings with, there were students who had produced questionable medical certificates to delay undertaking assessments because they had been unable to find time to study. The certificates were supposedly provided by a medical practitioner who, following my investigation, was found to have died some three years before the certificates were presented.

Also, a lucrative black market had developed in contract cheating. This is the buying of assessments from students at another university (Cousins, 2011; Preiss, 2012). This was uncovered when a student submitted an assessment complete with the email chain to the original author. Today, contract cheating is a very real problem with a myriad of websites dedicated to this industry and antiplagiarism tools such as Turnitin employing authorship-investigation techniques to detect such behaviour (Turnitin, 2018).

Some students at Partner C, who were feeling embattled, told me that they would tend to congregate together for comfort and security both at the institution and elsewhere in Melbourne. Their meeting as a group outside the institution, however, was sometimes seen as aggressive by other groups in the city. According to a number of Indian and Nepalese students at Partner C, their group was "constantly" targeted and attacked (usually verbally but, on several occasions, physically) by groups of other ethnic minorities. So serious was the problem that in 2008, when I was teaching at Partner C*, walkers* would be organised to ensure that nobody left the institution alone, especially

female students. Despite this, physical attacks occurred not only on the students I taught but also on other students (Mark, 2009). My students told me of beatings and muggings that were common, especially on the regional train services. The students I taught experienced stabbings and rapes. The stabbings were also widely reported in the media (News-Agencies, 2009; Miller, 2010). For some unknown reason the rapes appeared to go unreported in the media. The murder of Nitan Garg in 2010, which was widely reported in the media, brought the students' sense of insecurity to a climax (Miller, 2010).

## 4.4 Reaction to the Australian Universities Quality Agency

In early 2009, the staff of the Newgarth University Business School were given a mandate by the Head that the school was to teach via a blended-learning delivery method for all units offered at all locations (see Chapter 1). The blended-learning initiative was introduced in response to a preliminary release of an external-course audit by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) conducted in 2008 and released in 2009. This audit recommended that Newgarth University provide greater access to online components for students at its partner institutions (AUQA, 2009). What follows is a quote from the executive summary of the AUQA audit report of Newgarth University:

> Over half the university's higher education students are taught through partner-provider arrangements. AUQA considers there is a risk that [Newgarth University] may find it difficult to satisfy one criterion for a university in the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes, namely the criterion that requires a university to demonstrate a culture of sustained scholarship, which informs teaching and learning in all fields in which courses are offered. The university needs to do more to ensure such a culture is present across all teaching locations and reflected in its partner-provider teaching arrangements.
>
> The university has now commenced a process to identify a new preferred LMS. The Australian Universities Quality Agency endorses this process and encourages [Newgarth University] to complete it expeditiously. In this context, AUQA recommends that [Newgarth University] develop a flexible learning strategy for higher education. (AUQA, 2009, p .3)

The audit report continued with a summary of its observations.

> 4.4.7 Facilities and resources
>
> The [Newgarth University] & Partner Provider Responsibilities Manual includes guidelines on the development of collections and library spaces at partner-provider locations, drawn from the CAUL [Council of University Libraries] guidelines, and on the provision of ICT resources. The audit panel found that the facilities and resources available for students were quite limited at some of the partner-provider locations it visited, although others were good. The library and computing resources at [international Partners HK] and [Partner C] were adequate and expanding. Library facilities at [Partner D] in Sydney were minimal and computing resources at the locations visited by the panel appeared inadequate. The library at [Partner D] mainly comprises multiple copies of prescribed textbooks.
>
> On the matter of textbooks, the panel heard that many students did not buy textbooks and that in some locations, students copied them. [Partner C] facilitated the purchase of texts through its own bookshop. [Newgarth University] students at partner–provider locations were able to borrow print material from the [Newgarth University] library through document delivery. Recommendation 16 in the 2008 AUQA Audit Report was that [Newgarth University] ensure sufficient resources, including library resources, were

> available to students studying off campus. [Newgarth University] acknowledged that this was an area that required improvement, which was recognised in the [Newgarth University] Library International Student Support Action Plan for 2009.
>
> There is good communication between [Newgarth University's] dedicated international librarian and library staff at partner providers and efforts have been made to promote to students the availability of [Newgarth University's] online resources. Despite this, access to [Newgarth University's] library facilities by students is highly variable. Some students at [international Partner HK] had only recently become aware of this access, while other students reported frequent problems with access. Students at partner-provider locations visited by the panel had widely varying awareness of their ability to access grades, the LMS, and or other [Newgarth University] sites. Student recreational and social areas at onshore partner providers are only minimally equipped, and social activities for students are far from extensive.
>
> The audit panel encouraged [Newgarth University] to take these matters into account in negotiations with partner providers in Australia and to find additional ways to assist international students in Australia to gain a more rounded Australian experience. [Newgarth University] students at onshore partner providers received little careers advice from [Newgarth University], although [Partner C] had an innovative scheme to employ students in its own operations and was reactivating its own career advisory services. Newgarth was urged to improve the standard of facilities, resources and experiences provided to students at onshore partner-provider locations. These students were paying fees not much lower than the international students at [Newgarth University] and, therefore should have had access to comparable facilities and experiences. (AUQA, 2009, p . 47)

Recommendation 15 from the report (AUQA, 2009) stated the following:

> AUQA recommends that [Newgarth University] take action to improve the facilities and resource provided to students by its onshore partner providers, which, depending on the location, include IT, library and recreational facilities and social activities to improve the student experience. (AUQA, 2009, p. 8)

The majority of the issues in the comments made by the AUQA panel had been addressed and implemented to some degree in the commercial law units prior to the audit. However, the issue of blended learning had neither been implicitly addressed by the AUQA panel nor implemented in the commercial law units. My recommendation to the Head of the Business School was that since the students at partner institutions did not have the facilities available to participate effectively in blended learning, there would need to be closer liaison with the partner teachers for such a move.

I noted that the comments from AUQA related to the difficulty of access to the Newgarth University resources that students at partner providers were experiencing. This needed to be addressed prior to the implementation of blended learning. At the time, there was no direct link to the Newgarth LMS from the partner institutions' intranets. Therefore, students were required to access the Newgarth LMS from the internet external to the partner institutions. There was a small-metered allowance on internet usage for every student at the partner institutions. However, once this allowance had been exhausted, the students were then charged for additional usage of the internet. Having the students work online on the Newgarth LMS rapidly used up their allowance, which prevented them from accessing the required material unless they paid for the additional access. I was assured by the Head of the Business School that students would have no problem with access to the learning materials

once the proposed CD with all the material they required was introduced. This initiative, I was assured, would be sufficient to "tick the boxes" on the AUQA form.

Up to the start of Semester 1, 2009, the delivery method that had been used at the partner institutions was not considered by the Newgarth University academics to be blended learning. Blended learning, as described by Garrison and Vaughan (2008, p. 5), "is not an addition that simply builds another expensive educational layer. It represents a restructuring of class contact hours with the goal to enhance engagement and to extend access to internet-based learning opportunities".

What was being offered at the partner institutions was simply an electronic repository of PowerPoint slides and associated notes and files. What was actually happening at the partner institutions was simply a replacement of traditional chalk or whiteboard tools with a projector and PowerPoint. In fact, one lecturer continued to use an overhead projector and slides, which did exactly the same job. As described in the introduction, the electronic resources at the partner institutions consisted only of an internal intranet. It was capable of storing files but was not an interactive learning tool. This intranet arrangement was unsuitable for blended-learning education. It could not be used interactively to replace traditional class times (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). It also could not be used to interface with internet-based learning systems. For example, for students to access Newgarth University's electronic Blackboard system, they had to log out of the partner institution's system and log into Newgarth's system with a different identification number.

However, the partner institutions' intranets were well suited to the social and pastoral care of the students, which the LMS at Newgarth could not provide. A portion of their intranet service was an electronic noticeboard. Students were, for example, able to organise accommodation and employment as well as discounts for student groups to travel home, or it could be used to help to create a better working and studying environment for the students. It also advised students that there were discounted rates available at some medical centres and at the local coffee shop.

It was not until electronic assessment was attempted to be introduced to the partner institutions that it was realised that an intranet competing with the learning management system at the University of Newgarth would create problems.

## 4.5 Teaching at Partner C

In 2007, I invigilated an exam at Partner C for the second semester. Following conversations held at an examiners' meeting in relation to this exam, I was invited by all the onshore Newgarth University partner institutions (with the exception of Partner B) to visit and evaluate their teaching and learning. These opportunities enabled me to interact with the students at the partner institutions on a personal level. What followed over the next three years was an attempt to put in place teaching strategies for the commercial law units at Newgarth University and its partner institutions that were robust and pedagogically sound.

The strategies had to accommodate the underpinning interests of the students, the partner institutions, and Newgarth University. They also had to provide up-to-date commercial law content based on English common law in a manner that could be understood by the majority of students, many of whom had a relatively low level of English fluency and who were not from common law jurisdictions. At the beginning of 2008, I remodelled the commercial law units to incorporate different strategies. In Semester 2, 2008, I personally conducted the teaching at Partner C in the hope of demonstrating that the international students at partner institutions were capable of attaining comparable grades with those students studying at the home campus of Newgarth University.

The compulsory commercial law unit was regarded amongst the MPA students at Newgarth University and its partner institutions as notoriously difficult. The transition from numerical-based accountancy units to this literacy-based unit was particularly difficult for international students with limited English skills. Their difficulty was also compounded by their limited experience of Australian culture, business and law. The problem was further complicated by the "compressed" nature of the commercial law unit. The students undertaking commercial law were predominantly first-year postgraduate students. They were also predominantly recent arrivals to Australia. The students reported, in a vast majority of cases, that the recruiting process they went through, and the visa applications they had made in their countries of origin, had created delays, which caused them to arrive up to three weeks late for the start of the semester (Dept of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, 2008). Their late arrival effectively excluded them from the first assessment exercise.

Prior to 2007, the low pass rate of students at the partner institutions in general had been a cause for concern for some Newgarth University staff. Following on from my visit to the partner institutions, I arranged to be at Partner C in Melbourne to invigilate a final exam in an attempt to see firsthand what was happening. The exam was a closed-book exam in which no text materials were allowed to be taken in to the examination room. Approximately half of the students left the exam after only twenty minutes of a two-hour exam period. I asked as many of the students as I could why they left early. All their responses could be divided into the following four main categories:

- The students did not understand the questions. They claimed the questions did not relate to what they had been taught.

- The students had not read the prescribed textbooks. Most said they came from small mountain villages, where they had had to borrow money for their tuition. In their native county, all reading materials had been supplied by the provider, so they had not budgeted for any purchases of textbooks. They claimed there were no textbooks in the institution's library.

- Many students claimed that the exam had been made deliberately difficult to force them to repeat the units in order to make more money for Newgarth University and the partner institution.

- The majority of students made claims of racial discrimination in that the exam used technical language to disadvantage, exclude and discriminate against those with lesser English language skills and vocabulary.

I conducted several discussions with the lecturer in commercial law at this partner institution, who told me that he did not like the set text and materials, so he did not teach to them. This explained why the exam, set by the Newgarth University unit coordinator, did not relate to the materials taught at the partner institution. The lecturer's rationale was that he had himself written a textbook that he believed was better. He recommended this text to the students and he taught from that. The lecturer was able to supply copies of his book at greatly reduced rates. I noted that his textbook was seven years out of date.

Having examined all the relevant factors in this situation, I deduced that is not possible to remove all disadvantages for the international students at partner institutions. There will always be variables

where one group will encounter advantages or disadvantages over another group. I decided that a strategy needed to be embarked on to create equivalence, as recommended by AUQA, between the Newgarth University on-campus students and those at the partner institutions. The strategy was seven-fold:

1. To teach the commercial law unit by using a pedagogy of "shared contextual understanding" (Fuller, 1949, 1964).

2. To restructure the assessment regime to allow the initial assessment to be formative rather than summative. Assessments were to be accumulative as each assessment task would set the foundations for the subsequent assessment.

3. To change the textbook to an annotated text; this would be updated yearly. The textbook was to be the same as one used in several other large universities so that there would be inexpensive second-hand copies available. The new textbook was very comprehensive but was aimed at a higher academic level than the ones previously prescribed. There was a deliberate intention not to be condescending to the students' academic levels and to convey to them that their ability to learn was respected.

4. To rewrite the unit materials to replace the legalese in the existing version with ordinary, everyday, conversational English. Pictorial representations and flow diagrams were added to the materials to aid student understanding.

5. To change the final exam to open book so as to encourage students to obtain the textbook. This was achieved by informing the students that one question in the exam could only be answered with the aid of the textbook.

6. To place MP3 recordings of lectures and tutorials at Newgarth University on the common drive at the partner institutions.

7. I requested that, as the commercial law course coordinator, I be allowed to teach this unit at the partner institutions so that I could gauge the problems and observe the students first hand. (I was given permission to teach a semester at Partner C in the following semester and to give guest lectures at all the other partner institutions.)

The principle of *shared contextual understanding* (Fuller, 1949) was the key to this strategy. Law is geographically specific in nature in that it relates to the geographical context of its jurisdiction. The context is not only geographical but also temporal and social. For example, witchcraft was illegal 400 years ago in Europe. Today, it is accepted that magic is a normal part of the Australian Aboriginal culture of Dreaming. Fuller (1949) wrote a seminal essay on the Speluncian explorers, and how location and context can suspend generally accepted norms. In Fuller's example, trapped cavers resorted to cannibalism to survive. The example indicated that the normal conventions of law and

morality were suspended by the geographical isolation of the cavers. The desire to stay alive created an imperative to the cavers, which overrode the possibility that there could be rescue attempts that reached them in time to save them all. Thus, law operates in the geographical, moral, and temporal environment in which it exists.

To place this in context, any law that the international students may have known prior to arriving in Australia needed to be deconstructed to the smallest simple elements that everyone could agree with, and then reconstructed in the temporal, geographical and social setting of Australia in 2007–08. This and the other strategies aforementioned appeared to work quite well. The students did indeed acquire textbooks, and these were used in the open-book examinations. The student pass rates for all the partner institutions increased, with dramatic increases being seen at Partner C and Partner D on both of their campuses.

Being the commercial law coordinator, I took the precaution of having all of the students' assessments from the partner institutions corrected by external markers to ensure that the scores were credible and that I had not been marking too generously. The final exam marks revealed that the students at the partner institutions had attained an average passing mark of 72% across all campuses and 78% of the students at Partner C passed the unit compared with 0% the year before. The students at the Newgarth University home campus did still perform better than students at the partner institutions; however, the final pass rate for all campuses was comparable. This outcome indicated that in the previous year it was not necessarily the students at the partner institutions who had been at fault. Their poor results, it appeared, were most likely due to the method by which they had been taught.

I had by mid-2008 implemented six steps of my seven-step plan. My next step in identifying problems in the method of delivery of commercial law was to go and teach at the partner institutions myself. At the suggestion of the then Head of the Business School, it was arranged that I attend the partner institutions as an adjunct associate professor (in name only). The reasons for this were that the international students, who were mainly of Indian origin, tend to respect those with high academic status and, consequently, nearly all of the students would address the lecturer as professor.

The Head explained that in India, undergraduate programs are typically taught by colleges, whose operations are overseen by the universities. This structure was very similar to the relationship between Newgarth University and its partner institutions. In the Indian educational system, the universities are typically graduate schools, where the lecturers are addressed as professor. This created some difficulties for the Indian students because, in undertaking postgraduate courses such as the MPA, their expectation was that the lecturers teaching them would have higher academic qualifications. As it was, most of the teachers at the partner institutions were not even designated as lecturers; they were employed as tutors. An appointment as an adjunct associate professor *pro tem* automatically gained me the respect of the students for that position, or at least outwardly.

At Partner C in Melbourne, the number of students undertaking the MPA, and the size of the lecture rooms available, dictated that the students were taught in streams. In Semester 2, 2008, there were three lecture streams and eight tutorials. The students who attended the 6 pm to 9 pm lecture that I had decided to teach were, in the main, repeating the unit. As such, they were in a position to draw comparisons between my teaching and that which they had received previously.

The materials created for the class were simple. I had created PowerPoint presentations, which utilised very plain, everyday English, and I structured the course around ordinary, everyday topics. I deliberately stayed away from the PowerPoint presentations that were provided to lecturers from the publishers of the textbook because I wanted to build a personal rapport with the students and to

give them a sense of my personal style. I found that the publisher-provided PowerPoint presentations, in most cases, simply reiterated the text of the book without further elaboration. These presentations also tended to relate to the publisher's system of delivery and to incorporate the tutorials and test questions used in the textbook, which also provided the answers to the students. More engagement with the students was achieved by personalising the materials to their situation. The students participated in lectures and tutorials when they could relate to the subject being about their lives. Consequently, commercial law did not become a barrier to them; it became a way for them to learn about living in the Australian society.

The first lecture in the unit was the *getting to know me and them* lecture. In this lecture, I tried to determine some of the backgrounds of the students, why they were there, and what they were hoping to achieve. I also tried to determine their accounting and legal backgrounds, the experience they may have in these fields, and the experiences that they had to date in a major Australian city. I asked students to take pictures of signs and notices in shops (such as *you break it you bought it*) and to bring these back to class to be discussed in a legal context. Based upon this first lecture, I fine-tuned the materials for the rest of the unit. I found the students to be remarkably responsive to this process. Most students brought back photos of signs that prohibited them from activities. We discussed the legal implications of the signs. I listened to the students, I listened to their concerns, and I tried to provide answers for their concerns.

The class grew in size rapidly. It appeared that the students were bringing in friends from outside. The friends would come along to be entertained and to learn something about their legal responsibilities and rights within Australia. The lectures were scheduled to be two hours long with a one-hour tutorial following. However, I cannot remember a time when they were under four hours. The students generally wanted to keep extending the lectures. Because the lectures became so long, and we were finishing so late at night, I organised the students to make sure they were travelling home in groups and that no unaccompanied females were travelling home alone. On many occasions when lectures had finished, my wife would be waiting in the foyer to travel home with me after having worked late in the city herself. The students in my lecture stream got to know her and she became quite well known, especially within the Indian student circles, as Mrs Darryl. Often students would call me or contact me with problems about accommodation or work. As my wife worked in student advocacy at another institution, she could often help the students with these problems.

The cohort of students I taught performed exceedingly well. Not only was there a class pass rate in the 80% region but a greater understanding of the law was also indicated by an increased level of performance of the students. It appeared that by teaching the students the practical foundations of the law, they were able to develop abstract applications. To ensure that I could not personally affect the outcome of assessments, I arranged for the assessment tasks to be set by external moderators. These moderators were external to the Newgarth University. I made sure that I did not have access to the assessment material so that there could be no possible implication that I was teaching to the assessments by making sure that the students were well versed in the answers to the assessment questions.

This method of double-blind assessment demonstrated that the only element that had changed in the cohort of students I was teaching, compared with the previous year's students, was the method by which they were taught. The partner institutions, the assessment tasks, the international origins of the student cohort, and the topics covered in the unit all remained constant over the period from Semester 1, 2007 to Semester 2, 2008 (five teaching periods). The only variable elements were the changes to the presentation in Semester 1, 2008 and the teacher in Semester 2, 2008. These two changes raised the pass rates at Partner C in Melbourne from a 100% failure rate to an 80% pass rate.

The introduction of the seven-point strategy had increased the average pass rates across all of the partner institutions to 78%. This exercise had demonstrated that the pedagogy utilised in teaching international students studying the MPA was crucial.

One interesting and unexpected result of this exercise occurred with the Newgarth University on-campus students. Exactly the same materials and assessments were given to these students. The lecturer was also subjected to the double-blind criteria, did not know the content of the assessments, and was not involved in marking the assessments. There appeared to be a slight decrease in the performance of the students at the university itself. This resulted in almost identical pass rates and performance rates as those of the students at Partner C. The same proportion of high distinctions and distinctions were awarded. However, in the past, the Newgarth students' performances had always been markedly better than those of even the best performing partner students. This result was noted by the examiners' committee for the semester. It was also noted that the make-up of the on-campus student cohort at Newgarth University was, for the first time, almost entirely of international students.

While this increase in student performance at the partner institutions seemed to be an ideal state of affairs, it did actually cause some problems. The students of Partner C, at which I was teaching, had a group meeting. At this meeting, the students who attended decided that the partner institutions had not been providing the correct level of instruction that was required for the students to pass their degrees. In short, the students claimed that the partner institutions were forcing students to repeat units unnecessarily and that the partner institutions had been reckless regarding the type and quality of instruction they were providing to the students.

The students were aware that the CPA would not accredit graduates of the partner institutions. On the basis of the DIIRD (2008) report, *Overseas Students Education Experience Taskforce*, the students were also aware that they had the legal ability to change institutions without academic penalty. A substantial number of students from Partner C in Melbourne, the majority of those studying for the MPA, decided that the easiest way to remedy their situation was to withdraw from Partner C en masse and enrol directly at the Newgarth University campus. They did this and physically turned up at Newgarth University in a fleet of seven buses.

This caused an extreme amount of concern to both Newgarth University and all the partner institutions. The students claimed that they simply wanted the quality of instruction to which they were entitled but believed they were not getting. The students claimed that my teaching and results at Partner C demonstrated that they were receiving substandard tuition in other subjects and that they had a right to equal quality tuition as the Newgarth on-campus students were receiving under section 52 of the *Trade Practices Act 1974*. The partner institutions felt that they had been undermined by my teaching at their campuses and called for my dismissal. Newgarth University also found itself in a difficult situation as it had not addressed the inequality in the material and the teaching quality at the partner institutions. In short, it was argued by the students that Newgarth University was in breach of contract and had failed in its duty of care to its students (Victorian Auditor-General, 2009).

The situation required a compromise. The standards set out in the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007 were re-evaluated by the staff at both Newgarth University and the partner institutions and implemented for the students at the partner institutions. The students were requested by senior management at Newgarth University to return to the partner institutions where they had originally enrolled. I was to be reappointed to Newgarth University in a student discipline role. In this role, I would be required to visit the partner institutions on a regular basis to conduct hearings and investigations into matters

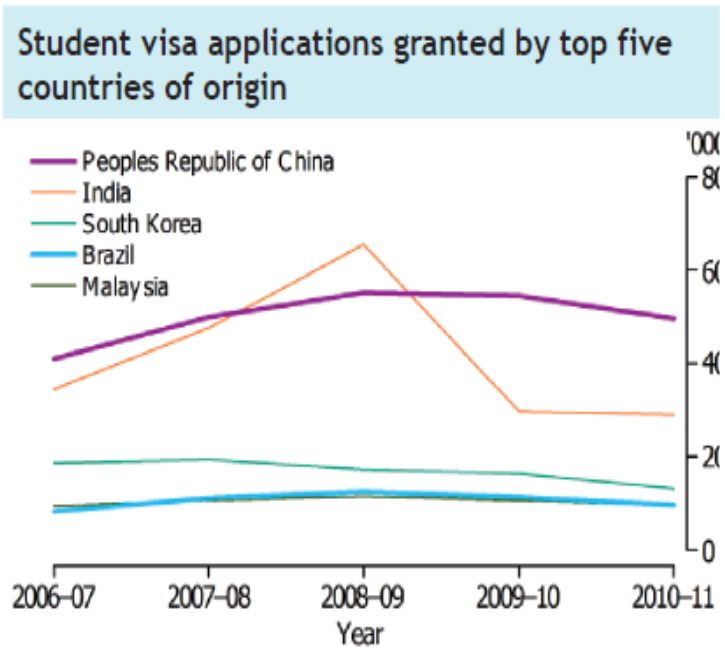
such as breaches of the University's rules and plagiarism. During the course of these visits, it was my task to ensure that student materials and instructions remained equivalent to those provided by Newgarth University to its on-campus students. At the examiners' committee's discretion, I could be asked to investigate units where a wide disparity in marks and grades had been detected.

Following the student-bussing incident, I noticed that the situation at the partner institutions had started to change quite rapidly. Much of my seven-point strategy was being applied to other units in the MPA. I was able to introduce to the students what is called a CAVAL card, which permitted a student who is a member of one participating university library to use the libraries of other universities who were contributing to the scheme. In the major cities, this meant that the students could access five major university libraries as well as being able to borrow books from the Newgarth University library. This was a major step forward from the situation where the students had little access to library resources because libraries at the partner institutions had been almost non-existent.

By the end of the summer semester in 2008–09, the partner institutions had taken on board a great deal of comment about the need to provide pastoral care for their students. As part of the partner institutions' teaching agreements with Newgarth University, the partner institutions were to provide a learning management system, which would be available to the students in such a manner as to help promote and establish pastoral care for them. The student "hard drive" intranet at the partner institutions started to satisfactorily achieve this. The partners were able to provide accommodation and job advertisements plus local activities and general advice for city living.

## 4.6 The 2009 Melbourne Student Protests

To complete my account of the context of the study, a brief description of the Indian student protest of 2009 needs to be given. In the preceding financial year, 2007–08, the Australian education sector received $13.7 billion from international students (Birrell & Smith, 2010). International student numbers in Australia had reached 356,597 in 2008, 79,718 of whom were classified as Indian from their visa applications (Birrell & Smith, 2010). This peak can be seen in the graph in Figure 19, which represents student visa applications for the financial years 2006–07 to 2010–11.




Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Student visa program trends, 2004-05 to 2010-11, accessed 11 October 2011

*Figure 15*. ASB student visa trends 2006–07 to 2010–11. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011)

During this same period there were 1447 reported violent attacks on Indian students in Australia (Wilson, 2010). Simon Overland, the Victoria Police Commissioner at the time, stated that this was an over-representation in violence and robbery statistics. Although there were attacks on students of other ethnic origins, the attacks on Indian students were reported more often in the media. This prominence in the media made many students feel racially targeted and more aware of racial vilification and discrimination (Hodge & Karvelas, 2009; Indiatimes, 2009; News-Agencies, 2009; Trounson, 2009; Verghese, 2009; Wikipedia., 2013; Wilson, 2010).

The effects of the attacks on the Indian students were damaging to the education industry at that time. International students, in particular Indian students, were organised, vocal, and active in the media and prepared to take direct action. Student organisations, such as the Federation of Indian Students in Australia (FISA), gained a good following in Indian newspapers. These reports, in turn, gained equally damaging media prominence in Australia.

I had contact with several thousand international students via the partner institutions and through being invited to attend "status meetings." In these meetings, students made the point clear that they considered that the Australian public and education sector thought international students were nothing more than "cash cows" to be exploited (Indiatimes, 2009). At the meetings I attended, the DIIRD (2008) report was constantly cited as evidence of the exploitation of international students by the education institutions. Indian students in Victoria were restless that threats to their physical safety were not being taken seriously. The Melbourne-based newspaper, *The Age*, reported online that:

> The Federation of Indian Students of Australia say they know of 60 serious assaults in Melbourne in a few years. Many go unreported. The police and the state government have a reference group to talk about the issue and play down race but it's an open secret around Werribee that attacks are usually racial by local gangs of mixed ethnicity. (Johnston, 2009, unpaginated)

The participants at the meeting were very angry that the Victorian Government appeared to be blaming the students themselves for the violent attacks. Victorian taxi drivers had already made a strong protest about violence towards them by blockading Flinders Street in the CBD. The government reacted very quickly, which indicated that demonstrations were a way to trigger a reaction. The stabbing of one of the students studying at Partner C in Melbourne in May 2009 caused uproar amongst the students and the Indian community. Sharavan Kumar was assaulted while walking with friends; the 25-year-old was stabbed in the torso with a sharpened screwdriver in what appeared to be a premeditated racial attack by a group of youths. Vigils were held at the Royal Melbourne Hospital for several students who had been attacked. Baljinder Singh, who was also attacked that weekend, told the Indian online news channel CNN-IBN that: "I think this is a racial attack. I want to know if the Indian government is doing anything for the students. Lots of students are being attacked in Melbourne. I am just recovering right now. The police say they will speak to me on Monday (1 June) about the compensation" (IBNlive, 2009, unpaginated).

A "peace rally" started outside the Royal Melbourne Hospital where Sharavan Kumar had been being treated since 9 May, 2009. The protesters had something to cheer about as doctors announced that Kumar had regained consciousness and was now "out of danger" (News-Agencies, 2009). The peace rally was so effective that other rallies were held in Sydney and other places in Melbourne. A large number of international students in Victoria organised a protest rally against their collective perceived treatment in Australia. They were strongly supported by the Federation of Indian Students

in Australia (FISA), the National Union of Students, and the Melbourne Graduate Students Association and other organisations in the community. At the rally, the president of the Melbourne Graduate Students Association, Paul Coats, condemned the Victorian police in these attacks, claiming that: "…they [the police] blame Indian students for 'making themselves targets' rather than blaming the climate of racism in Australia and the racist governments that exploit Indian international students through the commodification of education" (IANS, 2009, unpaginated).

The largest of these rallies, in Swanston Street on the 31 May, blocked traffic for several hours.

*Figure 16.* Indian students protesting on 31 May 2009 in Melbourne. Blocking Swanston and Flinders streets. (Wikipedia., 2013).

*Figure 17.* Stabbed with screwdriver. Indian student Sravan Kumar Theerthala in Royal Melbourne Hospital. https://www.smh.com.au/national/indian-stab-victim-aussie-banker-to-pay-for-airfare-20090603-bv2m.html Reprinted with permission.


*Figure 18.* Melbourne students preparing for the Peace Rally. Support for Sravan Kumar. Copyright to 123RF.com. Reprinted with permission.

*Figure 19.* Indian students are enraged by comments from Victoria Police. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-05-31/indian-students-protest-in-melbourne-over-the/1699898.


*Figure 20.* Rallies of Thousands of Indian students protesting. Student protests in Melbourne are reported around the world [Reuters] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2009/06/20096275733600624.html.

*Figure 21.* 21-year-old Nitin Garg. Mr Garg was stabbed to death in a park at West Footscray, on his way to work. ABC TV. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2010-01-04/21-year-old-nitin-garg/2747932


*Figure 22.* An effigy of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is burned. A protest in Calcutta, India, on Tuesday over recent attacks on Indian students in Australia. *http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/world/archives/2009/06/11/2003445877*. Reprinted with permission.

By June 2009, the protest had escalated to the point where the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, telephoned the then Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, to discuss the issue. At that time, demonstrators in New Delhi had burnt effigies of Kevin Rudd outside the Australian Commission (Hodge & Karvelas, 2009). *The Australian* articulated the concerns that the students had and also put in to words the worst fears of the educational institutions (Trounson, 2009). *The Australian* suggested that the fallout from the protests had "the distinct possibility that the holy cash cow period would come to an end" (Trounson, 2009, unpaginated). Following the protests, applications for new student visas from Indian students dropped from 65,000 to fewer than 30,000. There was even a decrease in the Chinese student population. For universities that relied heavily on international students, the result could potentially have been catastrophic.

The realisation that the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007 (the National Code) was not really working was acknowledged by the then new Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, who undertook to ensure a fast-tracking of a regulatory review of the National Code. The review of the National Code and the ESOS Act was finalised in 2010.

Only a few months after the peace rally in May 2009, the Premier of Victoria, John Brumby, again denounced the Indian Government's claim that Melbourne was a racist and violent city for Indian students. This occurred when it was realised that two of the high-profile alleged racist incidents reported in the media were actually perpetrated by Indian nationals. The incidents embarrassed the Indian government and media coverage of the student protest almost completely stopped until the murder of Nitin Garg in January 2010, which reignited the debates. Brumby's hesitation to accept the Indian point of view was substantiated in 2011 when the Australian Institute of Criminology released a study entitled *Crimes against International Students: 2005–2009* (Larsen, Payne, & Tomison, 2011). This study found that over the period 2005 to 2009, Indian students experienced an average assault rate in some jurisdictions but, overall, they experienced lower assault rates than the Australian average (Australian Institute Of Criminology, 2011).

## 4.7 Conclusion

My personal experience with the students I encountered at the Newgarth University partner institutions was that they were hard-working, studious and genuine students who, for the most part, were not afforded the due diligence they expected under the protection of the Australian law. They possessed strong cultural and community ties with each other, which enabled them to create allegiance groups that presented a united lobby to effect change to their situation. Newgarth University's international students were aware that they were part of a multi-billion-dollar industry.

In relation to the research question of "what went wrong?" The Australian education sector at the time was one of poor business practices and inadequate reporting processes. These observations were supported by the reports *Overseas Student Education Experience Taskforce (Victoria)* (Dept of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, 2008), *International students: Risks and responsibilities of universities* (Victorian Auditor-General, 2009) and the *Investigation into how Universities Deal with International Students* (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011). The students were subjected to racial discrimination in the education process and racial discrimination and vilification in the wider society. The students claimed that the Australian Government had a responsibility to them that included a positive duty to afford them safety and to protect their rights as consumers of

educational services and products. The students for the most part believed that the federal and state governments had failed them on this.

Another facet that was noted was that the students understood that by fulfilling the regulatory requirements of the immigration rules, they could legally apply for permanent residency in Australia. The process of applying for permanent residency required them to complete a degree. Once this had been achieved, they assumed the Australia regulatory requirements had been fulfilled. Obtaining a university qualification, therefore, for most of the international students I encountered, was simply a means by which to gain permanent residency in Australia. There was no question that this was anything but legal, ethical and acceptable.

"How can we understand what happened here?" A very important conclusion that could be drawn from the situational context of the period 2007 to 2010 was that the students at the partner institutions, once given the opportunity to understand the materials, could perform just as well academically as any of the Australian domestic students.

The resistance of the students I dealt with in relation to the product and services provided by Newgarth University and its partner institutions was, it appears, two-fold; first, the commercial power, and second the bottom-line profits. The students resented the commercial "take it or leave it" attitude of the education providers and pushed back against this. The students also resented the "cash cow" mentality where they were considered endless sources of money. It was only after a decline in student enrolments had started to occur that Newgarth University and its partner institutions started to provide a much more convivial atmosphere for teaching and learning. At the end of the student protest period, and as a result of better unit delivery, the atmosphere among the commercial law students at Partner C became more positive and vibrant, which was vastly different from the previous 12 months.

With one exception, there was also a marked improvement in pastoral care across Newgarth University's partner institutions. With the improvement of pastoral care there was a much more vibrant and positive feel to the partner institutions as well as a much-improved performance from the students.

This chapter has set the context of the international students studying at Newgarth University and its partner institutions. It has revealed that the students were far from being passive; they were, in fact, strongly assertive. Collectively, they had the power and influence to change how they were treated and determine the services they felt they should receive.

So, "What does this mean for me personally?" Autoethnography requires that the emotional aspect of observation is also relevant data to the reader. The purpose is to enable the reader to feel the experience as well as read it (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 2004). I am very hesitant to do this both professionally where the process is the important aspect and on religious grounds, where to claim glorification for an act of humanity is a mortal sin. Though I can empathise and attempt to place the students emotional state in this context. The students were isolated - I remember that well from my first online experience. They were people who grew up with extremely strong support systems from friends and family. There was a realistic expectation that they would find the same support systems provided by the institutions they were attending. The isolation of the international students I encountered, in particular the Indian students, from their home communities caused them to form very tight-knit student communities in their social and educational settings. The bonds they formed were gave them an identity and solidarity. The identity stood them apart from others in society. They sought out others with similar manifestos. The Melbourne international students, including those from Partner C, allied themselves to other students in similar situations, which resulted in very strong

allegiance groups. The students formed themselves into legally recognised organisations such as the Federation of Indian Students in Australia (FISA). They used the strength of their numbers to demonstrate to governments and industries alike that they had the power to damage the reputation of Australian education overseas. The reactions from two successive Australian prime ministers also demonstrated that the students had the power to enforce adherence to the statutory protections the law allowed them through trial by media. These students were no different to the thousands of student protesters around the world I have seen in my life time standing up for human rights. What were my emotions? I was just so proud of them!

The students respected the work I had conducted with them to achieve better outcomes and had risen to the challenges of learning law in the Australian setting. The next chapter demonstrates that building upon the work that had already been achieved with the international students of Newgarth University and its partner institutions, blended learning was introduced as a method of further enhancing the learning experience. What followed was a great surprise to me, with the almost total rejection of this introduction by the students. The remainder of this thesis is a description of how blended learning was introduced and an examination of the possible reasons why it was rejected by these very same students.

# *Chapter 5*

# *Reporting the Research:*

# *Phase 2 – The Online Test and Identification of the Issue*

## 5.1 Introduction

At the beginning of 2009, the staff of the Newgarth University Business School were given a mandate by the Head that the school was to teach via a blended-learning delivery method for all units offered at all locations. The effects of this implementation on the delivery method of the Master of Professional Accounting (MPA) degree taught at the partner institutions were, to say the least, surprising. The students did not appear to adopt the new strategy well. It was at this juncture that that the aims of the study were devised.

1. What went wrong? In a specific teaching period it appeared that a cohort of students had collectively decided not to undertake a small but important, centrally organised online test assessment. Was this actually the case?

2. How can we understand what happened here? Having determined what actually occurred, is it possible to analyse the event to create an understanding of the social political and cultural interplays

3. What does this mean for me personally? In true autoethnographical style am I able to analyse the event from the data of my own emotional and narrative journey.

To determine the first question of "What went wrong?" I had developed the focus question – "Does habitus affect learning-style inventories in relation to electronic learning management systems?" or, did the students previous education experience colour their perception of Blackboard? To understand how and why students would collectively decide not to submit an assessment. I first need to introduce why the implementation of blended learning was mandated; the structure of the assessment in question; the mechanics of blended learning; and how this differed from the use of the learning management system (LMS) in the delivery method initially implemented by Newgarth University for teaching at partner institutions.

Prior to the end of 2010, Newgarth University subscribed to Blackboard as its LMS. The Blackboard software is extremely good at generating statistical reports. It was when attempting to analyse these reports that I first realised that there may be a deeper problem in the commercial law units than simple assessment failure. In order to build a snapshot and triangulation of what had been occurring in the unit at the time of the study, I introduce the reader to these reports. They relate specifically to the students' access to, and performance, in the LMS of the commercial law unit of the MPA. More importantly, these reports relate to the period when I introduced the centrally organised online test in the unit. Without contextual information, these reports would be confusing. In order to make sense of them I needed more information. Gathering this information led to the study that was undertaken at the first stage of my research. This section covers the three teaching periods in 2009.

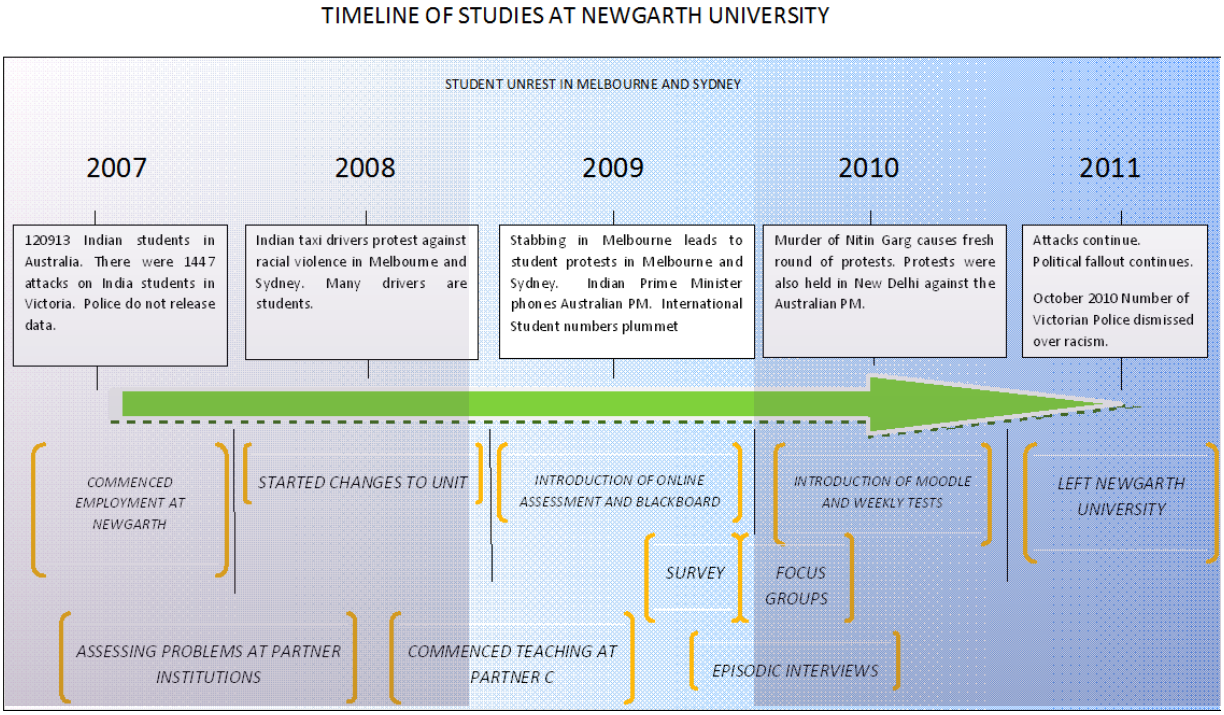



*Figure 22.* This section covers the three teaching periods in 2009

## 5.2 The Test

In order to accommodate the mandate from the Business School, a short, written mid-term test, that in previous semesters had been taken in class, was changed to a centrally organised online assessment task. This was organised for the commercial law unit that was being taught at all campuses and partner institutions of Newgarth University in Teaching Period 1, 2009. The assessment task remained very similar, utilising the same format of multiple-choice questions and covering the same topics. The only significant difference was that when previously undertaken, the test was conducted under test conditions in class, but this time the students could take the test at any time during the one-week window in which the test was available online.

Each student had one opportunity to submit the test. It was a simple online multiple-choice test consisting of 10 questions, which had been generated from a test bank of 400 questions and presented on the Blackboard LMS. The questions were automatically randomised so, in theory, no two students could receive the same test. It was worth 10 marks of the possible 100 marks for the combined assessments in the unit. The test was self-marking and provided instant feedback to the students. I had constructed the test to take no more than 10 minutes. I had performed *dummy runs* with volunteer students, where the average time to complete the test was 2 minutes 30 seconds. At the end of 10 minutes, the test would close, and the participant had the option of submitting the partial test or exiting and not submitting the attempt. There was no input needed from the lecturers at the partner institutions other than for them to remind students of the test. The lecturers at the partner institutions were not given the content of the test but were simply told that it examined materials covered in specified weeks of the unit.

All the internal students at Newgarth University undertook and submitted the test, yet fewer than 10% of students at the partner institutions submitted it. A requirement for passing the unit was that all assessment tasks had to be attempted. By not submitting the online assessment, the students were risking automatic failure. A legal argument was raised by the manager of Partner D in Sydney that the assessment was in contravention of the *ESOS Act 2000 (Cth)* as it changed the nature of the unit from face-to-face to an online unit. This objection was dismissed by the Head of the Business School. The manager's objection to the test was appealed to the University Academic Board. The Academic Board upheld the head's decision that a centrally organised online test did not convert the unit to an online unit.

Following this decision, I again pleaded the case to the Head of School that the rollout of blended learning disadvantaged the students at the partner institutions because, as had been pointed out in the 2009 AQUA report, they did not have access to the same resources available to the Newgarth on-campus students. The students physically at the Newgarth campus had unlimited access to Newgarth University's online resources, while the students at the partner institutions had limited internet allowances and thus limited access to Newgarth's resources. In addition, there were continuing "login" problems for the off-campus students. I put the case that the results of the online test should be disregarded until an evaluation of its accessibility was conducted in light of the accessibility difficulties for partner institution students that had been highlighted in the AUQA report (AUQA, 2009).

I recommended that the hurdle of requiring all assessment tasks for the unit to be attempted be suspended for that teaching period only, or that a non-submitted attempt be treated as an attempt. I felt that in the circumstances, no student should fail the unit for not undertaking the online test. However, as the evidence from the LMS reports show that the students could, and had, accessed the online test, the Head of School decided that marks for the assessment would stand. His rationale was that if a student chose to not undertake or submit an assessment, that was their decision. The individual student must accept the consequences that would lie with such a choice.

The failure of the majority of students at the partner institutions to submit the online test caused disappointment and great concern to me. Researchers such as Akkoyunlu (2008) had determined that a percentage of a given cohort would be likely to withdraw from any online assessment in a blended-learning mode. Skelton's (2009) research had shown that any online content must be regarded as important from a student's perspective for them to actively participate in it. On this basis, I had expected that the requirement of having to attempt all assessments in the unit would demonstrate to students the importance of the online assessment and override any mild reluctance they may have to participating. On this expectation and on the back of the previously discussed reforms that had been made to the unit, I had anticipated that the online assessment would be generally well accepted. It appeared that I was mistaken. Despite having a good relationship with the students, I had misinterpreted the positive attitude expressed towards me personally as an acceptance of changes to the unit from the students at partner institutions. This required further in-depth exploration.

In informal conversations with some of my senior colleagues, it was suggested that the students' reluctance to participate in the online assessment was simply another collective protest by a group of well-organised students to flex their collective muscle to gain an advantage for themselves as they had done in the past. The *bussing incident* (see Chapter 4.5) was often bought up as evidence of this. If such was the situation, there was still the question of *why did this occur?* Worse still, if this was recognised, why had those same senior staff members not chosen to address it previously? This did

not register with me at the time; it was only later that I realised there was already a recognition of communal resistance.

I personally regarded this reluctance on the part of the students as them having a common purpose; they had allied together and collectively decided that this change in assessment format was not in their best interests. If my perception was correct, and the students had formed an alliance, a common community. I saw this resistance as a shield being used defensively, not as a sword being used aggressively. Why then would they consider that an online assessment was not in their collective best interests? Something they had to protect themselves from. Why would this cohort of students take such a risk with their scarce monetary resources and for those who hoped to gain permanent residency, an even greater risk? Alternatively, was there something in the specific context of Newgarth University's partner institutions that was pedagogically, or socially, creating barriers that were preventing the implementation of blended learning?

Please allow me to flash forward six months at this point to give a clearer picture. Following on from the unsuccessful online assessment task in Teaching Period 1, 2009, the online assessment task in Teaching Period 2, 2009 was changed. The online assessment task was still worth 10% of the total marks for the unit. The assessment task had been amended to consist of a series of six fortnightly tests worth two marks each. The students would be awarded the best of the five scores out of the six attempts. The tests were online quizzes in a similar format to those used in Teaching Period 1. Each quiz contained five randomly selected questions from a bank of 200 questions relating to the topic of the tutorial for each week. This was a question bank that had a total of over 1,200 questions.

There were 12 weekly tutorials scheduled for the unit. There were no tests in week one as the tutorial consisted of a simple exercise in how to access the Blackboard LMS and find specific learning materials on the system. The Week 12 tutorial was a revision session so there were no tests for that week, either. The tests for each of the other weeks were left open for the 10-week period from Week 2 to Week 11. The students could take any of the tests at any time during those 10 weeks, although they only were permitted one attempt per test. Once a test had been opened online, it was automatically submitted when the students logged off regardless of whether it had been completed.

The rationale for the change from a single 10-point assessment to a series of tests was to ensure that students would learn how to use the LMS and to become familiar with the online medium. Familiarity would encourage students to locate and use other learning resources on the LMS. The change to leaving the tests open for 10 weeks was to prevent the reoccurrence of the non-submission problem that had transpired in the previous semester. I group-emailed all students to remind them each week that the tests were open and needed to be completed by Week 11. I observed that there was no discernible resistance from any students to the inclusion or undertaking of this minimal form of blended learning in Teaching Period 2, 2009. There was a slight disadvantage in this assessment format in that I was not able to use the assessment as an indicator of students at risk. As such, I only used this format for this semester and not in subsequent offerings.

Returning to the issue of the first test, it was of course necessary to find out what went wrong. The first point to consider was the Blackboard LMS and all the information that it contained.

## 5.3 The Blackboard Files

*We got so frustrated with it …* (Student at Partner C)

It has been established that an LMS is more than just a repository for electronic versions of face-to-face course materials. It can provide a medium that allows individual students to work through

modules at their own pace or provide a medium for hundreds of students to collaborate online. It can be interactive and support webs of association and activity. An LMS also has the capability to track student performances both individually and in selected groups. An LMS, correctly configured, can notify lecturers and relevant administration staff when a student is at risk of underperforming by identifying which students have accessed what areas of the LMS and how many times. An LMS can identify who has submitted assignments on time, or not at all, and even who has viewed feedback comments from the lecturers. In this manner, lecturers and administration staff can identify and contact students at risk of underperforming and put in place strategies to assist them.

The version of Blackboard that was used by Newgarth University prior to 2010 was an old version. It was based on a Windows 97/XP platform with inherent redundancies that could not be updated. It did have tracking capabilities, although these were unsophisticated in comparison to the 2014 and later versions of the platform.

**5.3.1 The test in Teaching Period 1 2009.** The Blackboard reports for course item usage (Figure 22 and Table 3) for the Teaching Period 1, in 2009, when the online test was introduced, indicate that only 17 students out of a total of 79 at Partner C had not logged into Blackboard by the conclusion of the unit in Week 12. Of the 364 students who were undertaking the unit in Teaching Period 1 (Semester 1) in 2009 at all locations (including Newgarth University), only 15% submitted the online test. Yet the tools tracking the record of usages reveal that there were 1,576 sessions (hits) with the online test, which equated to 45% usage of the LMS by all students accessing it for this unit. The instructions for the online test, and due to a mistake, the test itself, could be accessed as many times as one wanted; however, the actual test could only be submitted once. Allowing for 100% of students to have a false start, this figure of 1,576 hits would suggest that every student in the unit attempted to access the assessment at least once. It is, of course, possible that just a few students attempted to access the assessment several hundred times, though this is extremely unlikely. The other items to have high usage were the folder and file (2,795 hits and 1,122 hits respectively), which contained the information for the written research assignment that was not online.

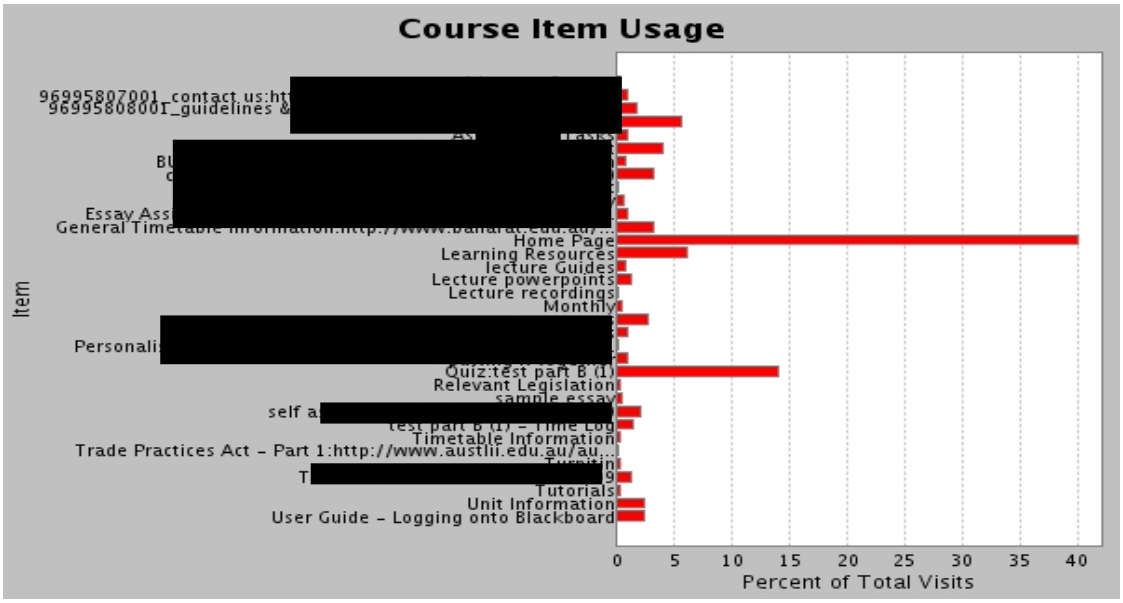



*Figure 23*. Blackboard report for course item usage in Teaching Period 1, 2009.

The barograph in Figure 23 indicates that 40% of total visit time was spent on the home page for the unit. This default page will open whenever a registered student accesses the unit's LMS for to commence a session. The second most active item was the online test which was displayed as "quiz test part B" (for reasons of naming protocol in the administration files – not because there were two parts to the test). Table 3 breaks down the bar graph and details the average time that was spent on each item.

The average time of 2 minutes and 20 seconds for the online assessment task is comparable with the times that students took to complete the test when I was conducting trials.

Table 3

Average Time Spent on Each Item

| Item | Number of sessions | Average time per session | Total time |
|---|---|---|---|
| Announcements | 244 | 0:00:08 | 0:31:13 |
| Assessments | 1576 | 0:02:20 | 61:14:50 |
| Assignments | 409 | 0:00:17 | 1:57:12 |
| Calendar | 83 | 0:00:23 | 0:32:20 |
| Discussions | 80 | 0:00:06 | 0:08:15 |
| File | 1122 | 0:01:56 | 36:07:33 |
| Folder | 2795 | 0:00:32 | 24:29:29 |
| My grades | 351 | 0:00:22 | 2:09:57 |
| Tracking | 207 | 0:00:44 | 2:30:34 |
| Turnitin assignment | 16 | 0:00:19 | 0:05:02 |
| Weblinks | 183 | 0:00:53 | 2:42:25 |
| Who's online | 111 | 0:01:15 | 2:18:59 |
| Total | 7177 | 0:09:15 | 134:47:49 |

The story that the Blackboard reports were telling was not instantly obvious. Of the possible number of entries for the online test, only eighty-one students submitted completed tests. The number of students undertaking the unit at Newgarth University home campus was sixty-nine. All the Newgarth University students at the home campus submitted their online test. This meant that only twelve students from all the partner institutions combined submitted completed tests. There were, however, 1,576 hits on the online test, with an average visit time of 2 minutes 20 seconds.

The test had been accessed and used more than any other tool available on Blackboard, other than opening the home page, and yet only 12% of students had submitted the assessment. It appeared that there was some factor, or factors, that had been present at all the partner institutions offering the commercial law units that had not been present at Newgarth University's home campus that had created a disincentive to students to undertake the online test.

In the past, I had determined that given the correct materials, the academic ability of students from all partners and campuses was comparable. The materials and instructions given for the unit were sufficient to enable all the on-campus students at Newgarth University to complete the assessment task successfully and at least twelve other students from the partner institutions. The 100%

compliance from the students at Newgarth suggested that they did not have a problem with the test, its content or delivery method. The same materials were given to both groups, and the same instructions were given to all students on Blackboard. It was not possible on this version of Blackboard to identify the individual students who accessed the test (a feature that is incorporated in later versions) other than through the grade book features. Though gradebook only showed completed submissions. As the number of hits was five times higher than the total number of students to which it was available, it would appear that the majority of students must have attempted, or at least opened the test, but did not submit it.

The students at the partner institutions, in order to access the online test, were able to negotiate (either collaboratively or individually) a complicated system of "logins" using different student identifications for the Newgarth University LMS without much difficulty. From conversations with students at both Newgarth University and the partner institutions, it was evident that most of the students were communicating with other students and family from different Australian states and other countries by email, phone, text, and tweets. This demonstrated to me that there was technical ability amongst the students, even those who had previously been the most technologically deprived. On that basis, it seemed logical to conclude that the issue of accessibility of the test on the Newgarth University LMS was unlikely to have been the primary reason for non-submission.

The content of the test did not appear to be the difficulty. Of the eighty-one students who attempted the test, seventy-eight passed. Given it had previously been established that the academic ability of the students at Newgarth University's home campus and the partner institutions was on a par, and even with some leniency given for language difficulties, the ability of the Newgarth University students to pass the test demonstrated that there should not have been academic obstacles for the students at the partner institutions.

By now, I was extremely curious. I could fathom no reason as to why this strange set of statistics had occurred. I decided to travel to Melbourne in order to speak to students at the Melbourne partner institutions to see if some light could be shed on the matter. As with my previous experience, the students at Partner B were very reluctant to speak to me. Nobody in administration at Partner B was forthcoming to help. The students at Partner A told me that some students had no difficulty with the test. Others had attempted the test as a group using laptops. These students were confused as they kept getting different questions. In the end, the test timed out and they lost the opportunity to submit. Other students told me that the test timed out before they had a chance to look up the answers in the textbook. They didn't bother reopening it. I asked these students what they would have done if the test had been held in-class with no textbooks allowed. The reply was that the lecturer would have given them a special lecture to cover the topic of the test, so they would have had the answers ready.

I sought out Gitika, my sponsor at Partner C, and her entourage (see *10 days in 2009*). When I asked her about the test, she said that the students were upset with it as it was unfair. Somewhat surprised, I asked her to explain. Gitika, and her ever-present entourage, told how the students at the partner institutions gathered in groups to undertake the test. One of the students in the group would open the test on a computer and the group worked through the questions together. They then took the answers back to their individual computers to undertake their own test. However, each test attempt generated a different set of questions, so the individual students did not have the correct answers. The students exited the tests without saving, and thus not submitting any answers for marking. The conversation with Gitika continued by her asking me:

> How unfair is it to be given individual tests? We got so frustrated with it that we just gave up.

I pointed out that the students must have known this was an individual test as they each had to go back to individual computers and login separately. The randomisation of the test questions was done to prevent just such collaboration. Gitika replied:

> …but that is unfair, everyone gets a different test, so how can you be sure that everyone gets the same level of question, and someone doesn't get hard ones and someone else easy ones? ... Anyway, it's not cheating to do it this way … there was nothing in the instructions to say we can't.

I told her that it was true; there were no instructions against collaboration in the test. However, the university's rules are that assessments are individual unless specified otherwise. There are rules against collaboration and collusion. The test was self-invigilated and designed to prevent such collaboration.

These brief conversations revealed factors that could not be dismissed. The first of these was that it was not just a small group of students at Partner C who felt that the test was unfair. Gitika had been speaking of her own experience, but almost every student at every partner institution where the commercial law unit was offered (with the exception of half the class at Partner A) had not submitted the online test. It appeared that the students at the other partner institutions were indeed in communication with each other. When Gitika said: "…we just gave up", she intended the "we" to mean the collective students at the partner institutions. Conversations with other students at Partner C confirmed the general feeling of unfairness.

The second factor was an issue of international students being disadvantaged by their cultural and educational backgrounds. I mentioned previously that once I gave the students materials in a format they could relate to, they were able to perform at a similar level to that of Australian domestic students. The same appeared to be the case with the online material. Once the students had allied together to create a study group, they were able to work collaboratively through the problems. At Partner A, some were comfortable working individually, and these students appeared to have successfully submitted the assessment.

When other students found they could not work collaboratively, as the questions were different, they were not able to perform at the same academic level. In the case of Partner C, one student operated the test online, while the rest of the group found or suggested the answers. According to the students' stories, this method worked reasonably well, but only for that one instance. When the students returned to their individual computers to complete the test, the collaboration had broken down due to the restrictions built into the test. However, the allegiances between the students had not broken down, and the evidence now (as will hopefully be established) suggests the allegiance was strong enough to enable students to collectively reject the online test.

For many of the partner institution students, the object of the assessment was not to learn the materials and be conversant with the content, but to simply pass the test. Passing the test would help accumulate enough points to pass the unit. This, in turn, would accumulate enough points to pass the course, and ultimately produce enough points to gain permanent residency. Thus, working collaboratively in this venture was understandable. The instructions for the test did not explicitly prohibit collaboration, although it is a feature of Australian education that all assessments are assumed to be on an individual basis unless stated otherwise.

For students from a collaborative culture, individual assessment was not the natural status quo. To attempt to undertake a test collaboratively, only to find that the construction of the test, by implication, forced individual responses would, to such students, understandably seem unfair. This

interpretation is plausible on the evidence and supports the objection from Gitika. This interpretation also provides some light on why there was almost no resistance to, or complaint about, the test at the Newgarth campus. For Australian domestic students, the cultural default setting for assessment is that it is individual. The international students at the Newgarth University home campus just conformed to this dominant culture. It is my personal experience that domestic students are uncomfortable with group assessments. Domestic students tend to feel that they are gaining an individual qualification and that qualification should not be judged on the contribution of other students. They fear that in (most) group situation(s) they will be assessed on the basis of the lowest performer or the lowest performer gets a "free ride." Culturally for domestic students, group assessments are often seen as unfair (Ashworth, Bannister & Thorne, 1997). This interpretation would also explain why just a few students at Partner A submitted the online test. The submissions were from international students from European and Russian Federation states, who, for whatever reason, were able to adapt to the educational culture of individual assessment and award.

Despite my new awareness of a possible cultural hesitancy from the international students to undertaking the online test individually, I still found it difficult to understand why, when so much was at risk for these students in terms of family, money, commitment and possible loss of the permanent residency points that they would risk failing a unit (and possibly the course) through what can only be described as passive resistance. If students were unhappy with the online test, why did they not just attempt and fail the assessment as so many had done in the past prior to my arrival at Newgarth University?

The cohort of students in Teaching Period 1, 2009 at the partner institutions had accessed the online test individually and then closed it without submitting. It would have been a simple matter to have submitted it unanswered and thereby have met the criteria of, at least, attempting every assessment. It was, after all, only worth 10% of the possible marks for the unit. Accessing the assessment and not submitting created a situation that was entirely new in my experience. It was different from anything that that I had experienced over the previous two years and six teaching periods. I decided that I would pursue the matter further by applying for ethics approval to conduct a survey of the students at the partner institutions to see if I could shed more light on the problem. The resultant survey produced interesting and even more unexpected results.

#### 5.3.2 The test in Teaching Period 2 2009.

The process of the ethics application for the survey was undertaken while teaching continued in Teaching Period 2 2009.

To ensure that I fulfilled the requirements of the ethics application, I did not undertake any teaching during that period, and I did not to place myself in any position where I could have been seen to influence the students. My method of monitoring the progress of the online tests was therefore via the Blackboard LMS. It was evident from the Blackboard reports that the modified online assessment for this period had been attracting some very different student activity to that which I had observed in Teaching Period 1, 2009.

The Blackboard LMS reports indicated that the online tests were being viewed and undertaken. The report on the individual tool usage revealed that the average time taken by students undertaking each test was less than a minute. In Table 4 it can be seen that there were considerably fewer students in Teaching Period 2, 2009 compared with Teaching Period 1, 2009. The table indicates that there were 30 sessions (compared with 1,576 in Teaching Period 1, 2009). The time spent on the tests as a comparison with the time usage of the rest of the LMS was only 15% despite there being more assessment activities.

Table 4

Blackboard Tool Usage Report Teaching Period 2, 2009

| item | Sessions | Average time per session | Total time | Per cent of total sessions (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Announcements | 8 | 0:00:03 | 0:00:23 | 0.26 |
| Assessments | 130 | 0:00:47 | 0:23:30 | 15.71 |
| Assignments | 15 | 0:00:10 | 0:02:29 | 1.66 |
| Calendar | 7 | 0:00:05 | 0:00:37 | 0.41 |
| Discussions | 5 | 0:00:03 | 0:00:13 | 0.14 |
| File | 41 | 0:00:39 | 0:26:25 | 17.66 |
| Folder | 137 | 0:00:20 | 0:45:28 | 30.39 |
| My grades | 10 | 0:00:08 | 0:01:22 | 0.91 |
| Tracking | 9 | 0:00:24 | 0:03:38 | 2.43 |
| Weblinks | 17 | 0:00:39 | 0:11:06 | 7.42 |
| Who's online | 21 | 0:01:38 | 0:34:25 | 23.01 |
| Total | 400 | 0:04:56 | 2:29:36 | 100.00 |

The course item usage report (Figure 24) indicates that there was very little activity with other tools on Blackboard. Only the home page showed significant usage. This would be due to every student opening this page automatically once entering Blackboard. This suggests that the tests were being undertaken as a bulk exercise – that is, more than one test being taken at a time, or all the tests being taken together, rather than on a weekly basis. This would also be consistent with the small number of hits for the assessment tool.

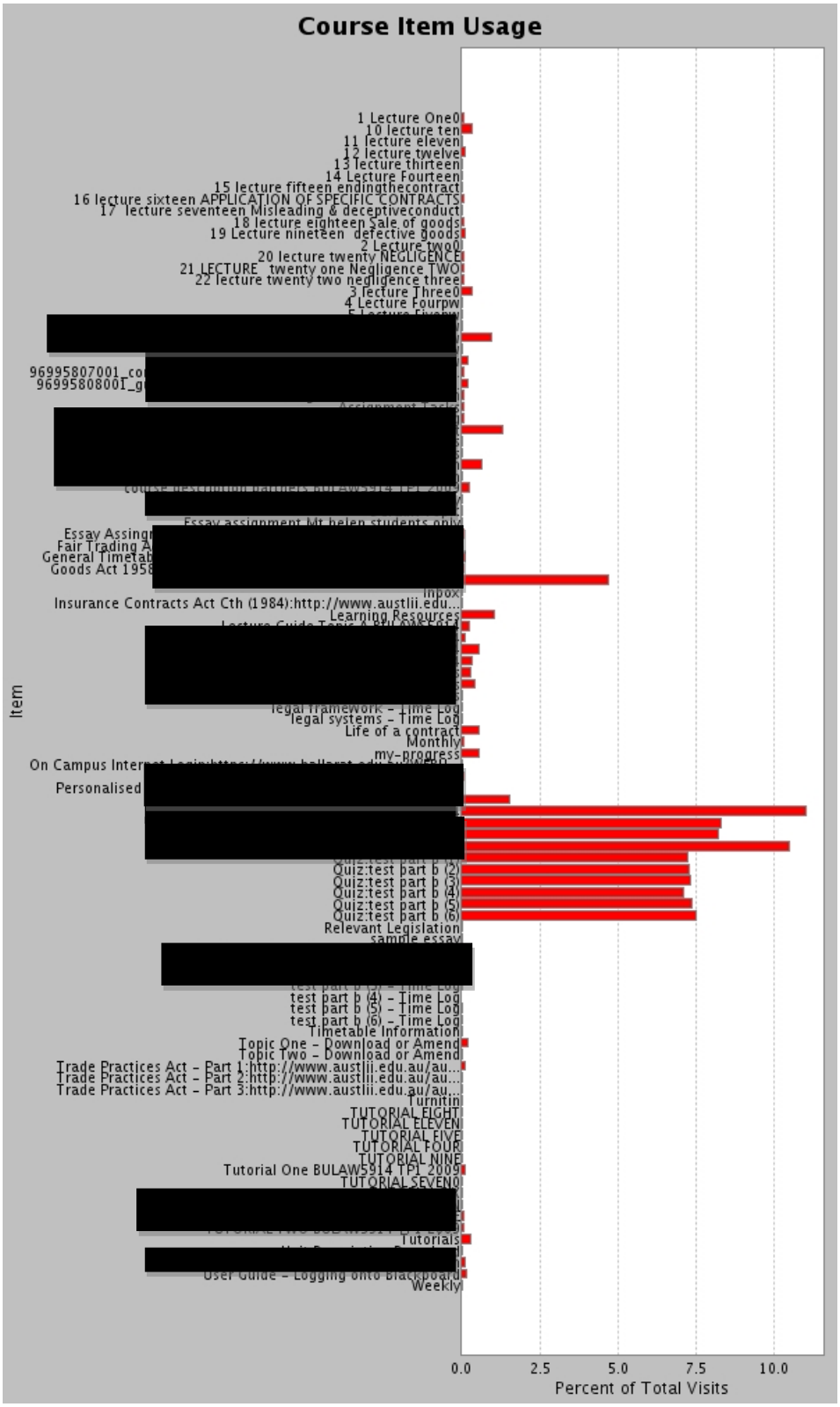



*Figure 24*. Blackboard report for course item usage in Teaching Period 2, 2009.

The problems that were encountered with the test in Teaching Period 1 were not evident in Teaching Period 2. The students at the partner institutions were accessing Blackboard and undertaking the weekly tests with what appeared to be fewer access problems to the Newgarth University systems. The change in criteria of the submission regime on Blackboard also appeared to be having an effect. Unlike Teaching Period 1, 2009, when there was access of the online assessment but no submission,

the completion rate of the test was 100%. There were no students who failed to attempt at least one question in each test. The only possibly conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the issue with the first test was simply the students' perceptions. The cohort in semester 1 felt that they were being unfairly treated and reacted accordingly. The students had created allegiances amongst themselves and these allegiances were strong enough to present a united front when they rejected the assessment.

## 5.4 Findings

The anecdotal discussion with Gitika was interesting but not sufficient by itself for a study of this kind. Her information needed to be corroborated by empirical data. This was achieved by conducting a survey across the majority of campuses. The quantitative survey (see Appendix A) was distributed to a population of 544 students at the five partner institution campuses located in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. The survey asked students from Teaching Periods 1 and 2 in 2009 about their experiences with the Blackboard LMS that was used in the commercial law class for the MPA offered by Newgarth University.

The survey was simultaneously conducted during the last lecture of the Teaching Period 2, 2009 at all participating partner institutions. The execution of the survey went almost without a hitch. I had sent the questionnaires to the relevant lecturers at the participating partner institutions with instructions on how the survey was to be conducted, and a pre-addressed, tracked, prepaid courier bag was included so that the questionnaire forms could be returned directly to me.

At Partner C in Sydney, the surveys were not conducted by the lecturers but by the personal assistant (PA) of Doreen, the manager. However, the survey papers never arrived at my office. The students later informed me that the surveys had been conducted. The PA personally informed me that the forms had been couriered back to me; she suggested that they may have become lost in the post. However, there was no record in the courier's tracking system of the package of surveys ever being picked up. In following conversations with Doreen, I was not totally convinced that the questionnaires had been lost in the post. All I did, however, was thank Doreen's PA for her trouble and asked that if the questionnaires turned up, could she forward them to me. This loss of surveys from Sydney constituted one hundred and forty-two non-replies. A further eighty-eight returned survey forms were unusable due to illegibility (five), non-completion (seventy-three) or inappropriate comments (relating to Blackboard being racist (ten)). Consequently, three hundred and fourteen returned forms were used in the research study.

The full results of the survey are detailed in B1, B2 and B3 in Appendix B. After each table, the conclusions drawn from the survey results are provided. The edited results for the survey for those students who undertook the commercial law unit in Teaching Periods 1 and 2 are as follows:

Table 5

*Summary of Survey Form Returns*

| Category | Teaching Period 1, 2009 | Teaching Period 2, 2009 |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 106 | 71 |
| Female | 70 | 61 |
| No reply | 3 | 3 |
| Total | 179 | 135 |

The demographics of the students revealed that:

- 86.3% of the students were in the 20 to 30 age group
- 96.5% of students identified as international.
- 3.5% did not indicate whether they were an international student.
- 26.7% of students identified themselves as of Indian or Asian ethnicity
- 66% did not indicate their ethnicity.

Five other yes/no questions were added to the demographic questions to determine the students' awareness of the computing environment at their respective partner campus and the functionality of the LMS in the course they were taking. A summary of the responses are as follows:

- 15.2% of students said they had a computer science degree
- 40% of students replied that they had basic computer skills
- 44.8% did not indicate their previous computer experience.

The student tracking report from the LMS for Teaching Period 1, 2009 indicated that the online assessment tool was the most accessed area of the LMS, where 52% of its use occurred. This is consistent with the survey results, which suggest that Teaching Period 1, 2009 students only accessed the LMS for the purpose of the one available online assessment.

The students were invited to comment in the survey. Some of the replies were as follows:

- That the school should provide training in the use of its learning management system.
- It is not in student's interest to only have one assessment in one course online.
- It is not time efficient to have to learn a completely new system when only one lecturer uses that system.
- There is no advantage in using Blackboard when the materials are available on the intranet.
- In addition, the comment I personally find most surprising: *"The intranet is available everywhere; Blackboard is only available at the partner campus."*

This last comment is somewhat confusing as Blackboard was available via the internet simply by accessing the parent website. These instructions are clearly given in the course description. This may be a misreading of the term *intranet* or an indication of language difficulty. These comments taken collectively tend to suggest that Blackboard was seen as a side salad. These comments must also be considered in the context that the Blackboard platform was out of date and was to be replaced by Moodle at the end of 2009.

The questions in the survey were categorised under four headings. The students' comments to the open-ended questions were then rated on a standardised Likert scale of 5 to 1. This was undertaken in an attempt to reduce any difficulty with the language and to alleviate any vagueness problems as cited by Ogden and Lo (2011). Despite the attempt to overcome this hurdle, it was apparent that many students were confused by the internal *intranet* and the external *internet*, even though an example of the intranet was given (such as I - drive) on the questionnaire. This confusion was discerned from the responses of a large numbers of students who replied that the *intranet* was available everywhere. In fact, both the partner institutions' *intranet* and Blackboard LMS could only be accessed externally (or off campus) via the *internet*.

The questions in the survey were categorised under four headings. The response rates to these questions relating to Blackboard were lower than for those mentioned previously as only those categories which had all the questions answered by an individual student could be counted as valid cases (see Table 6).

Table 6

Survey Results for Questions Relating to the Blackboard LMS

| | Teaching Period 1 2009 | | | Teaching Period 2 2009 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Response | M | SD | Valid cases | M | SD | Valid cases |
| I had no difficulty accessing Blackboard | 3.02 | 1.29 | 48 | 3.50 | 1.29 | 50 |
| I found Blackboard difficult to use | 4.54 | 1.29 | 37 | 3.00 | 1.29 | 24 |
| I found Blackboard valuable for the course | 3.52 | 1.29 | 53 | 3.58 | 1.29 | 12 |
| I feel that Blackboard needs improvement | 4.44 | 1.29 | 50 | 2.07 | 1.29 | 42 |

The mean response for Teaching Period 1's access scale was 3.02,

The mean response for Teaching Period 2's access scale was 3.03. Therefore, the overall student's perception of the online learning environment had improved by only 0.01, on the survey scale, between the semesters. This demonstrated that any advances made to help the students might have improved their performance, but not how they viewed and thought of the online learning environment. The percentage of students that had still been having difficulty logging into Blackboard had dropped from 65% to 35%, which suggests that the frustration associated with login difficulties was not a factor in the students' perceptions of the online environment.

While comparison cannot be made with the Chandra and Fisher study (2006) (3.99); or the Chang and Fisher study (2006) (3.96); nor for the Skelton study, (2009) (3.62) due to the obvious changes in the instrument, it can be taken that the response figure of 3.02 gave an inconclusive indication that the students were much less satisfied with the access to the LMS at partner institutions than the students in other courses. This is consistent with the result that 37% of students had encountered difficulties with access to the LMS and a further 22% had failed to respond to this question.

A side-by-side analysis of the salient points between the two cohorts of students surveyed showed some difference in the student demographics. There was a reasonable decrease in student numbers overall between the two semesters. Most notable was the significant decrease in the number of males undertaking the course, while the female student numbers decreased by only 5%. There was also evidence of a sharp decrease in the numbers of students working, which may have a correlation in gender ratios. Interestingly, the numbers of students who reported that they were in full-time work seemed to be focused in Melbourne, which was a marked departure from those in the first semester.

Another interesting departure of the second semester's students' replies was the answer to the question on ethnicity. The questionnaire results indicated that 31.85% of the students gave their ethnicity, the majority of whom identified as Indian. In the previous semester, almost no students identified as being from an Indian ethnic background. In the last of the demographic questions, the second-semester students indicated that they on average had less access to the internet and less expertise, though as mentioned previously by Ogden, vagueness of language may have been a factor in these answers (Ogden & Lo, 2011).

Some of the Sydney students, who did not return questionnaires but did attend a focus group, were unsure of the difference between SMS messaging via telecommunication carriers and emails and VOIP, which utilise data across the internet. While such confusion is entirely understandable, the question of exactly who had access to the internet may not have been entirely reliable.

The remaining five questions in relation to the Blackboard environment also had quite dramatic differences. In the second semester, 84% of the students found that Blackboard was a valuable tool despite the fact that they preferred the partner institutions' I - drive environment. Improvements in information dissemination relating to logging into Blackboard had evidently been effective, with only 35% citing difficulties. The majority of these difficulties were associated with student identification issues. It also appeared that with other Newgarth University units utilising Blackboard, students were logging into Blackboard for reasons other than to just undertake online assessments. In fact, only 40% of students who had logged into Blackboard for the first time had done so for purpose of undertaking online assessments.

## 5.5 My observations

*How did this period affect me personally?* The period from April to October 2009 was like being in a battle ground. I was no longer teaching in Melbourne but maintained contact with many of the students. Gitika and the entourage has taken to patrolling certain areas on nights at weekends. They had provided the students (mainly from Partner C) with a *hotline phone number* so that if there was any trouble they could be there as quickly as possible. It was not unusual for me or Sue to get phone calls in the middle of the night from Gitika or Lovepreet asking for help. I would provide what information I could. Occasionally, I would speak to the police for them. I was careful to act only as a representative of their educational providers concerned with their welfare, never as a lawyer. The media focus waned as some Indian nationals were found to have committed some of the crimes that had previously been described as racially motivated. The case of Puneet Puneet, the young Indian student who killed another student in a car crash then fled the country using another person's passport came back to the headlines (Bennett, 2017). Because of these incidents, heat went out of the students' demonstrations (at least until Nitin Garg's murder which happened just a kilometre or so from where we lived (Gupta, 2010)). Years later, having experienced the wake of the Bourke

Street tragedy (Sue and I worked just meters from this tragedy and walked this area several times a day, I vividly remember the area looking like a war zone. The following morning the Bourke Street pavement from Elizabeth to William Street was awash with flowers – ours included.)

*Figure 25.* A woman and child lay flowers at a memorial in Bourke street. Flower memorial for the victims of the car rampage. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-22/melbourne-mourners-give-flowers/8201462

It was only then that I realised what an effect the 2009 period had had on me (Hancock, 2017). I realised that had felt the same for a period of eight or so months in 2009 as I had after the Bourke Street tragedy: panic, remorse, sympathy, sorrow, guilt for not having done more, futility and sadness. I look back now and see that these same conflicting emotions were present in the students. I had observed that there was a marked difference in the attitude of the students between the first and second teaching periods. Both groups of students were lovely people. In teaching period one, I had had contact with the students for some time and had created a rapport with them. They were suspicious and wary, but trusted me. Most were working long hours to pay for the extra fees they needed due to the previous failures. These students were prepared to fight for their rights. They, too were filled with weariness and were emotionally drained from the events of the period. In Teaching Period 2, I observed that the higher number of female students had changed the small-group dynamics of the classroom to be much more inclusive. There was also a much stronger feeling of security and affluence than had been present in the previous semester. Gone were the gaunt, tense faces of students who were overtired and overstressed. In their place were bright-eyed, fresh-faced students dressed in designer clothes, all with the latest electronic gadgets. I had found the students in Teaching Period 1, specifically at Partner C in Melbourne and Sydney, to be quite hard in their outlook and unforgiving in their stance. They were almost militant, and battle hardened in their approach and attitude to anyone in authority. By comparison and contrary to my expectations, the students in Teaching Period 2 were accommodating, studious and relaxed in relation to their studies and environment. This was evident across most of the partner institutions with the exception of

Adelaide, where a change of management that resulted in staff leaving was probably the explanation for a drop in pass rates and an increase in student defections to other institutions and Partner B in Melbourne, which was still uncooperative. As to the research question of *"what happened?"* there was little help in the survey other than to inform me that there was indeed an issue with the online medium. Though, this in itself was a massive breakthrough, for the first time I had some empirical evidence that there was an issue, and that issue was not just a result of the political turmoil of the last six months.

## 5.6 Conclusion

*How can we understand what happened here?* The main results of the survey clearly indicated that the students at the partner institution were not at all happy with the implementation of blended learning and the Blackboard environment. There was a marked difference in the acceptance of the Blackboard environment between the two teaching periods of 2009 in that there was better access and more information available for the students. More Newgarth University units utilising Blackboard had given the partner institutions' students more exposure to it. This, in turn, had demonstrated the utility of the tool itself. However, in terms of student perceptions, the tool had still not measured up to the partner institutions' I - drives.

The results from the surveys must also be considered in the context that the Blackboard platform as offered by Newgarth University at that time had already reached its obsolescence date. Plans had already been made to move to the freeware Moodle. It is eminently possible that had the modern platform of Blackboard been available at the time of the survey, the students' perceptions may have been very different.

When examining the results of the survey, it should be noted in the first instance that the number of students who had enrolled for Teaching Period 2 was significantly fewer than those in Teaching Period 1. Also, that the number of returning students from the first teaching period was significantly lower when compared with the number I had seen in previous semesters. This meant that there had been little cross-pollination of institutional memory between the first and second teaching periods when compared with previous years.

The quantitative survey, while providing some interesting insights that effectively confirmed there was a problem with the online assessment in Teaching Period 1, 2009, failed to expose the underpinning reasoning behind the problem(s). The online assessment in Teaching Period 2, did not encounter any of the same difficulties or resistance. The comparison between the two teaching periods indicated that resistance to online assessment could be avoided, but it did not enlighten as to what was required to remove the resistance. It became evident that a second part of the study was required that would attempt to use qualitative methods to determine the underpinning reasons for the resistance to the online assessment task.

In the following chapters the two methods of qualitative data collection that were used in the study are examined. They were the episodic interview technique used with the students and the narratives provided by the students.

# *Chapter 6*

# *Reporting the Research: Phase 3 – the Qualitative Studies*

## 6.1 Introduction

It soon became evident that, while my sketch of the Web-Based Learning Environment Instrument (WEBLEI) was able to show the level of student dissatisfaction by a comparison between the two teaching periods, it was not able to provide a picture of why the online assessment was not successful. There needed to be some form of qualitative data collected that might explain the reason for its lack of success. My original design of the study was to interview individual volunteers from the student cohorts to gain their qualitative views. However, there was concern that the number of volunteers who may come forward would be quite small. This created concerns that any qualitative data from the individual volunteers could be unrepresentative. In order to collect valid qualitative data, I decided to use information from focus groups to augment the data collection process. Permission to conduct this research had not only been endorsed by the Head of the business school, he had encouraged it. Permission was also obtained from all of the partner institutions with the exception of Partner B in Melbourne.

Focus groups were conducted at the partner institutions A and C in Melbourne and Partners C and D in Sydney. These focus groups included students from the cohorts studying in both Teaching Periods 1 and 2 in 2009. The questions put to the focus groups called for discussion of the results of the quantitative survey. The discussion was intended to aid analysis of that data and to provide some insight into the conflicting results of the survey. In-depth episodic interviews were held with the students who volunteered in Melbourne, this was purely for logistical reasons. As was suspected only six students initially volunteered; four students completed the interviews. The episodic interviews were specifically designed to emulate Flick's style of interviewing for his study of the social representation of technological changes in everyday life (Flick, 1996; 1996 (b)).

In addition, there was a series of meetings that was conducted with partner institutions who were represented by the program managers. The first round of manager meetings was conducted prior to Teaching Period 1, 2009, where I explained the implementation of blended learning and the online assessment task. A second round of meetings, which took place at the beginning of Teaching Period 2 in 2009, was necessary for me to obtain ethics approval to approach students as research subjects. I was a participant–observer at these meetings. The summaries of these meetings are descriptive of the process required to establish the research. It had not originally been my intention to draw upon these meetings as relevant data as they were part of the process for delivery of the test and for the process of ethics approval application, though again all but Partner B agreed. It was only as a theme emerged from the qualitative data collection that these meetings became important to the study. I have included them as part of my personal story, because the reactions to my request for permission to conduct the research at both rounds of meetings were mixed. These mixed reactions were at the time frustrating. The reactions put together with the other data demonstrate a theme I had not before anticipated. This section covers the period of data collection from 2009 to mid-2010.

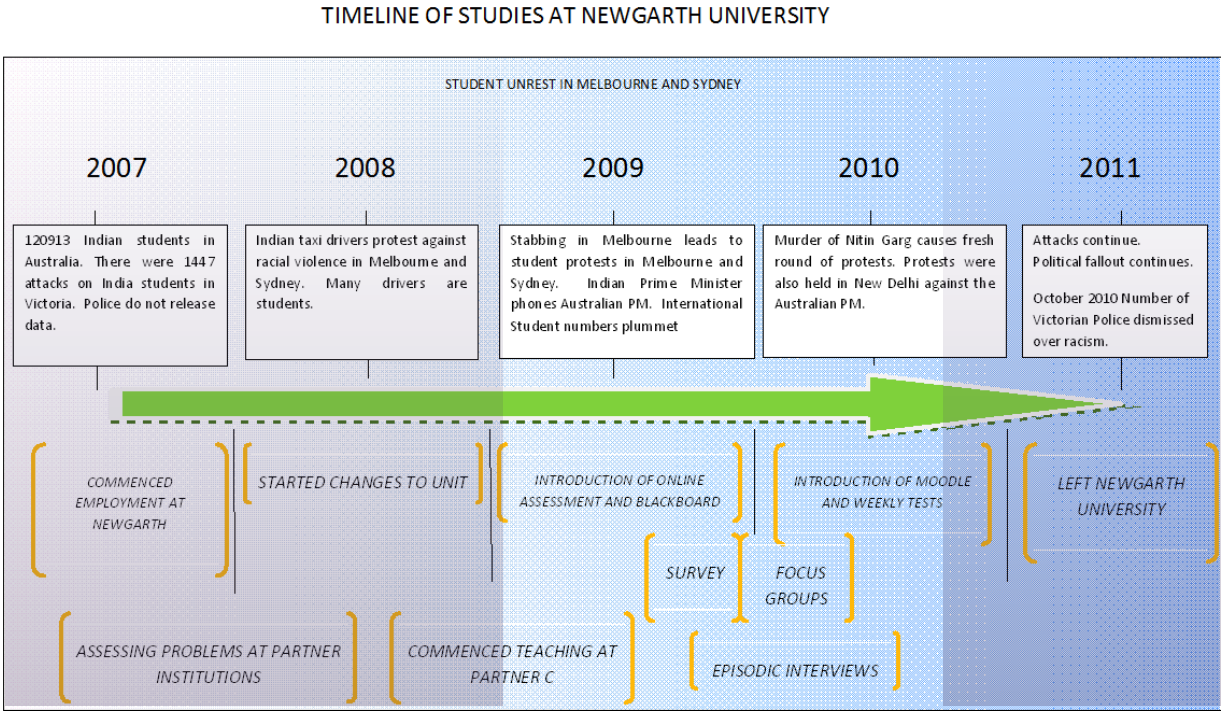



*Figure 26.* This section covers the period of data collection from 2009 to mid-2010

## 6.2 Meetings with the Partner Managers

**6.2.1 The first round of managers' meetings.** Let me return to the start of 2009 and the mandate to introduce blended learning to the partner institutions. The first round of the manager meetings in 2009 was conducted prior to the start of Teaching Period 1. The program managers at each of the partner institutions acted as each institution's representative. These meetings were not intended to be focus groups or interviews for the purpose of the research. The intention was for me to explain the purpose and implementation of the blended-learning material that was to be included in the commercial law units. My strategy for the introduction of the blended learning material was to ensure that all the relevant sessional lecturers at all partner institutions received training in using the Blackboard LMS.

The plan was that lecturers would be able to post ancillary information and material, in addition to the teaching materials provided by Newgarth University, on the unit pages – just the same as they did with the I - drives – and monitor the progress of students via the various online assessments. For example, from 2009 one of the assessment tasks for each of the commercial law units would be an online test based on the tutorial material. The test would be self-marking and would provide instant feedback to students. The online test would replace one of the previous assessment tasks that in previous years had been submitted in a hard copy format. Under this new arrangement, only one assessment task, apart from the final exam, was to be submitted in hard copy. This was an essay in Week Eight.

The strategy provided the lecturers with ample time to give timely and important feedback to the students – something that had not always occurred. By using this strategy, the lecturers at the

partner institutions were given much greater input into the structure of the units. The question of sessional-lecturer input was something that had always been an issue from the very beginning in 2007. A similar complaint from the lecturers at the partner institutions was the issue of workloads. Through the implementation of this arrangement, workloads were redirected to where they could have been of most value to the students.

The reporting facilities of Blackboard also enabled the lecturers to track the students' performance and identify those who were underperforming. I stressed to all the managers that blended learning enhanced face-to-face teaching; it was not designed to replace it. It was imperative to explain to both the managers and the lecturers that there was no danger of this use of blended learning being considered as only offering online education, which was restricted and discouraged under international students' visa conditions.

From the commencement of meetings with the managers to explain the implementation of blended learning, it was evident that this was not going to be an easy path. There was hesitation on the part of some managers. Their diffidence gave me a feeling of unease. Three of the six managers at the partner institutions had been supportive of the work that had been previously done on the commercial law units to improve student performance. They were the managers of Partner A in Melbourne, Partner C in Melbourne and Partner D in Sydney, who had all agreed to meet with me to discuss blended-learning options. The other managers were less enthusiastic. The manager of Partner B in Melbourne declined a meeting. The manager of Partner D in Adelaide agreed to a phone conversation only. The manager of Partner C in Sydney consented to a meeting but was not receptive to the idea of any online components of the units.

I was at a loss to understand why there was hesitation about something that seemed to me to be obviously beneficial to students and the partner institutions. When stressing this point with the managers, it became evident to me that, in at least three cases, the managers of the partner institutions were not entirely conversant with legislation relating to international students. Two mangers kept insisting that international students were not allowed to study online. The ESOS Act, understandably, restricts international students to no more than 25% of their coursework being fully online while studying in Australia. The purpose of the limitation was to ensure that international students attended face-to-face classes in Australia.

The 25% online provision was to accommodate instances where no face-to-face courses were offered, a common occurrence over the summer teaching period. The hesitant managers appeared to have the misconception that incorporating an element of blended learning into a unit of study equated to providing fully online courses, and that if 25% of the content of a blended-learning unit was delivered online, then any international students who took that unit would be breaching their visa requirements. Despite my assurances that the implementation of blended learning was what AUQA was actually demanding of Newgarth University, the hesitation remained.

In the meetings that I held with the partner institution managers, it appeared to me that their resistance to Newgarth University itself was very strong. They appeared to be working on a misconception and resented what they perceived as Newgarth University telling the partner institutions how to teach and deliver its units.

#### *6.2.1.1 Meeting with Partner D in Adelaide.*

Sitara, the manager at Partner D in Adelaide, suggested in a telephone conversation that the partner institutions should be completely autonomous and should be allowed to set their own curriculums and assessments, with the rationale being that their students struggled with the set materials provided by Newgarth University. Sitara suggested that many

more students would pass if the partner institution lecturers were allowed to set their own materials aimed at the particular institution's student cohort. As such, she would not support the centralisation of online materials produced by Newgarth University.

I took great pains to point out that equivalence of materials across campuses was of primary importance to Newgarth University. This equivalence would ensure fairness and comparability across all the partner institutions. One way to achieve this was by the use of blended learning and the centralisation of materials, which, now for the first time, would enable the lecturers at partner institutions to have input. The purpose of centralisation was to promote collaboration and support the partner institutions sessional staff, not alienate them.

***6.2.1.2 Meeting with Partner B in Melbourne.*** I was not able to obtain a phone conversation with Sanjeev, the manager at Partner B in Melbourne. I had on two previous occasions in 2008 been allowed to meet with his students. These meetings had been difficult as Sanjeev supervised them personally. Sanjeev had a particularly overbearing nature and the students seemed very hesitant to speak with me for fear of receiving an adverse reaction from Sanjeev.

Following Sanjeev's appeal to the Pro Vice Chancellor's (PVC) office, it was difficult to talk to him. From this point, Sanjeev refused to communicate with me directly, and would only communicate with Newgarth University via the PVC's office. My offer to explain blended learning to him was declined as was my invitation for students at Partner B to participate in the survey. It was not possible to determine from the Blackboard reports available if any students from Partner B accessed the LMS before the online assessment task was available to them. No student from Partner B, however, undertook the task. This was not a complete surprise to me.

***6.2.1.3 Meeting with Partner A in Melbourne.*** The meeting with Rose, the education manager at Partner A, was conducted in her Melbourne office. During this meeting, Rose expressed her appreciation for the improvements that had been made to the units and the time I had put into establishing and retaining personal contact with the staff and students. Following my explanation of the planned online assessment task, I was assured by Rose that I would be given full cooperation. I was introduced to the new IT manager, who gave me a tour and demonstration of new IT servers and Wi-Fi connections. These servers were able to give the students unlimited internet access. Hyperlinks were also embedded into each unit's home page on the I - drives, which connected to the home page of the corresponding units at Newgarth University's LMS.

***6.2.1.4 Meeting with Partner C in Melbourne.*** The meeting with Jane from Partner C was held in her unofficial office in the coffee shop beneath the building. It was a very informal meeting. Jane was very supportive of blended learning and actively encouraged the inclusion of a greater electronic component in the units. Jane had been an advocate for change in the MPA program from the beginning of my involvement in 2007. We had continued a respectful dialogue about many of the teaching changes that had taken place since 2007, which had been discussed and negotiated with her. Jane was pleased with the progress we had made to date for the students and wanted this to continue. She said she would support the implementation of the online assessment where possible but asked to be consulted if there was any change to the assessment regime.

#### *6.2.1.5 Meeting with Partner C in Sydney.*

Doreen was the manager of Partner C in Sydney. She was also very active on the management board of Partner C. She undertook a great deal of international travel to promote Partner C in various countries. While Doreen said she was very supportive of any blended learning development, she also explained that she believed that industry sensitivity took priority. She spoke of changes to the education system that was being flagged in federal government policy, which could potentially see Partner C offering its own degrees in a greatly expanded manner.

Doreen spoke of the possible expansion of the institution to other states with, potentially, four more campuses. This expansion would require an ICT network owned and operated by the institution, which would run its own LMS. Centralisation of assessment by Newgarth University was not part of her vision for the future. Doreen was concerned that any form of blended learning implemented at the partner institutions could be construed as online education, which international students were prohibited from undertaking according to the provisions of their visas. While she was supportive of the work that had been done to improve pass rates and student wellbeing, Doreen did not believe that there should be a greater online component in the units. She was quite emphatic that this was not what the students wanted.

Reflecting on this, I concluded that Doreen had appropriated ownership of the units to the extent that she regarded the involvement of Newgarth University as an inconvenience that she could do without. Doreen pulled no punches when emphasising that she was the one with the financial power since she was in a position to deliver desperately needed students to Newgarth University. To her, the issue was that Newgarth would do as she wished, or it would run the risk of losing the income stream that Partner C generated.

#### *6.2.1.6 Meeting with Partner D in Sydney.*

The education manager at Partner D in Sydney was Priya. Priya had previously been supportive of attempts to make the students more comfortable with the units and to improve the pass rates. Priya was delighted at the prospect of the sessional lecturers employed at Partner D being more involved in the units. She agreed that a great deal had been achieved through good communication and cooperation with Newgarth University. Priya maintained that any further involvement of the sessional lecturers in the actual unit construction process could only be beneficial for students.

#### *6.2.1.7 Analysis of meetings with partner managers.*

My analysis of these meetings was that Doreen at Partner C, again, mentioned that she was very concerned about market sensitivity. However, she had either not displayed a good understanding of the legislation regarding international students and the recent advances in ICT and learning technologies, or alternatively, she may have been attempting to pull the wool over my eyes. She mentioned that she wanted to ensure that nothing could disrupt the direction in which she was steering the institution. She had displayed a conflict of interest between her partner institution's responsibilities to Newgarth University students in her care and the possible future students of Partner C.

It appeared to me that she was prepared to sacrifice potential improvements to the Newgarth students' materials and environment at that time by not accepting blended learning. It was also apparent that Doreen, by expressing emphasis on market sensitivity, was indicating that her priority was to ensure that partner C expanded in a manner which she had control over. This would not include a move to centralisation of assessments, or a system where all materials were on an external computer server away from Doreen's control.

Sitara's objections to blended learning coincided with Doreen's but for a very different reason. Sitara also wanted to further distance her institution from the oversight of Newgarth University in an attempt to obtain greater institutional autonomy. However, this was based on her students' comments that the units were very difficult. Sitara reasoned that the poor performance of students at Partner D in Adelaide was due to the content and moderation of the units themselves. Thus, in order to improve her students' performance, Sitara wanted to remove the safeguards of moderation and equivalence by controlling the content and moderation herself.

The issue here was whether the academic levels should be lowered to accommodate the students' pass rates. As discussed in Chapter 4, lowering academic levels is unnecessary if quality teaching is made accessible to students. The conversation I had with Sitara was in the same vein as my conversation with Doreen. The situation at Partner C was also somewhat similar to the situation at Partner B in Melbourne.

It is not possible for me to comment on the internal decision-making at Partner B. I can only speculate from my own observations. Lecturers, tutors and students had been specifically denied permission for me to use notes of my meetings with them for my research. In all cases, fear of reprisal in the form of dismissal or suspension was mentioned. In relation to the commercial law units, Partner B was not subjected to the same moderation and equivalence processes as the other partner institutions.

As described in Chapter 1, all partner institutions, other than Partner B, had been subjected to a moderation process to ensure that marking was consistent across all iterations of the commercial law unit. Moderation reports were sent from the unit coordinators located at Newgarth University to the university's Business School examiners' board for ratification at the end of each teaching period.

Also, as explained in Chapter 1, all moderation and equivalence decisions that were made by the Newgarth University Business School's examiners' board in relation to the commercial law unit at Partner B were overturned at private and confidential meetings between Partner B managers and senior university administrators. It was evident that conversations had been conducted in relation to the online assessment task amongst the various partner institutions. What was not evident was whether these conversations had occurred amongst the students or between the management of the partner institutions, or both. It did occur to me at this point, that if an individual in authority at a partner institution were able to promote blended learning to the students, it was equally possible that they could also deter its use. Should such a person wish to conduct an unofficial protest, the best form would be to encourage the students to conduct civil unrest. The opinions of the managers did not change appreciably from the first meetings regarding the introduction of the online assessment and the request to conduct research following the completion of the online assessment.

Despite resistance from Doreen, Sanjeev, and Sitara, the blended-learning initiative was instituted in Teaching Period 1, 2009 as per the Head of School's mandate.

#### 6.2.2 The second round of managers' meetings.

I conducted a second round of meetings with the managers of the partner institutions six months later at the beginning of Teaching Period 2, 2009. Where possible, each new teaching period, I attended all partner institutions to meet the new student cohorts for the commercial law unit and introduced myself as the man from Newgarth University. This was also a very good opportunity to meet with the lecturers employed by the partner institutions to see if there were any issues that needed to be dealt with.

As discussed in Chapter 3, I took the opportunity at this round of meetings to gain permission to conduct research using student surveys and interviews. In addition to the research, I needed to

discuss the implications of the non-submission of the online assessment task that had occurred earlier in the year. To facilitate this, I described the parameters of the research and took pains to allay concerns about privacy and confidentiality. Where I had established good communication with the education managers and the teaching staff at particular partner institutions, the possibility and logistics of undertaking my research was well received. Priya, Jane and Rose extended every possible courtesy and facility that was available to them. They saw the implementation of blended learning and my research as beneficial to both the institutions and the students.

The online assessment task had been held in Week 4 of Teaching Period 1, 2009 towards the end of April. As the task was self-marking, I was able to see in the week following the deadline for submission of the task that it had not been a success.

***6.2.2.1 Second meeting with Partner B in Melbourne.*** I was, again, unable to obtain a phone conversation with Sanjeev, the manager of Partner B in Melbourne. He continued to not reply to my email requests for a meeting or return my phone calls. After these initial attempts to contact Sanjeev, the Head of the Business School requested me not to contact Sanjeev about the research. This directive had come from the PVC's office. The head also told me that he had fielded queries from the PVC's office about why I had contacted Sanjeev and the nature and necessity of my research. The Head also told me he had defended these queries and supported the research as he regarded it as very valuable.

***6.2.2.2 Second meeting with Partner D in Adelaide.*** Sitara, the manager, was not comfortable with the research. However, after she had had phone conversations with Priya in Sydney and the Head of the Newgarth Business School, she consented to the survey being conducted but not to any interviews. Sitara indicated that as a personal favour she would support my research on the basis of supporting personal development. However, this support was on the understanding that the results of the research would not in any way be used as evidence to justify the implementation of the blended-learning initiative.

***6.2.2.3 Second meeting with Partner C in Melbourne.*** Jane's only concerns were about ensuring the credibility of the research and ensuring that I was not in a position where there could have been a conflict of interest between my data collection responsibilities and my teaching duties. Once Jane was satisfied that the students would not be put in a position where they may feel that non-participation in the research could affect their course marks, she gave her permission. The remainder of the meeting dealt with the logistics of the actual survey.

***6.2.2.4 Second meeting with Partner C in Sydney.*** Doreen repeated and emphasised that she was supportive of the work that had been done to improve pass rates and student wellbeing. However, she still did not believe that there should be a greater online component in the units. Doreen was quite emphatic on the point that online componentry was not what the students wanted, the results of the online assessment had shown this, and she felt that this would be reflected in the survey. Doreen agreed to the survey being conducted on the basis of it being completely anonymous, but she refused to let individual students be interviewed. Doreen also required that the right of veto for any publication directly concerning Partner C.

***6.2.2.5 Second meeting with Partner D in Sydney.*** In terms of the research, Priya said she would provide all possible assistance. I agreed to ensure the credibility of the

research and to relate to her the findings of the survey. I was also to ensure that I was not in a position of conflict with both data collection and teaching duties. I also agreed to inform the student counsellors at the institutions and arrange with them for appointments should any student require them. Once again, Priya asked that the students not be put in a position where they may feel that non-participation could affect their course marks. Obviously, all participation by students was voluntary and confidential. If I could satisfy all requirements of the HREC application and provide Priya with a copy of the acceptance, then she agreed I could conduct the interviews with her blessing.

***6.2.2.6 Conclusions from the second round of meetings.*** This round of meetings did not present any further issues that surprised me. At the time, my focus was on the students, not on the institutions themselves. It was much later that it appeared to me that the institutions were aligning themselves with each other. This was surprising as it was not an alignment that was immediately obvious. It was not a company alignment. In fact, it possibly more resembled the type of alignment one sees in the survivor game shows where fragile alliances are made in order to progress. The alliances would be self-serving and would vanish at the first threat to the individual good. But it was here that the idea of communities and allegiances was starting to germinate.

## 6.3 The Focus Groups

The aim of this phase of the study was to focus specifically upon student perceptions of the use of an LMS within a blended-learning environment and why this may have led to the non-submission of the assessment task. I hoped to determine the specific elements that may have led to the students' failure to submit the online assessment task. At this stage of the study, I was still convinced that something, some act by Newgarth, had resulted in the non-submission.

By the end of teaching of the second semester, I had the results from the survey. I had worked almost nonstop to collate the figures from the returned surveys. It was evident as expected that there were too few volunteers for personal interviews to gain comprehensive qualitative feedback, so I decided the best way to understand the results of the quantitative survey was to ask the students themselves what they might have meant by their responses. From the information derived from the quantitative survey, it would appear that without the online assessment, few students would have accessed the LMS at all, which would have defeated the university's attempt to move to blended learning.

I wanted these findings to be put to focus groups for clarification and elaboration. The focus groups were held at Partner C's campuses in Melbourne and Sydney, Partner D's campus in Sydney and Partner A's campus in Melbourne. The focus groups were added to the end of a lecture on exam preparation at the end of teaching for the second semester 2009. This lecture was ten days after teaching had stopped and before the exam period. The exam lecture was open to all students undertaking law topics. There were both undergraduate and postgraduate offerings for these units, dependent upon the degree being undertaken. The participants at the exam preparation lectures were mainly the current cohort undertaking the postgraduate commercial law units. I had considered restricting the focus groups to only those students who had conducted the survey. However, as the purpose of the focus groups was to gain insights into the survey results, I saw no disadvantage or conflict with having both cohorts combined and other students contributing.

I conducted the exam preparation lecture at Partner A in Melbourne in conjunction with the institution's lecturers for the units. The sessions in Sydney were delivered by me in conjunction with the Head of Law from Newgarth University. I recorded the sessions on an Olympus digital recorder with a lapel microphone. The students were informed that I was recording the session. The sessions took place in teaching rooms and were well attended.

Face-to-face lectures tended to be well patronised as all students at each partner institution had to be identified and checked as having attended classes as it was a requirement of their student visas. Attendance at fewer than 75% of classes could lead to a breach of the student visa requirements, which could invoke exclusion clauses and result in the student being required to leave Australia. Unfortunately, even the threat of deportation, apparently, cannot overcome some students' notorious aversion to morning lectures. It can be seen from the lecturer's reporting spreadsheet (see Figure 25) that morning classes held at 9 am are not well attended. Only twenty-one of the one hundred and twenty-five enrolled students attended commercial law lectures, and only twenty-six of the one hundred fifty enrolled students attended the company law lectures. Therefore, to ensure that the maximum number of students could be invited to participate in the focus groups, the extra lectures were held mid-afternoon.

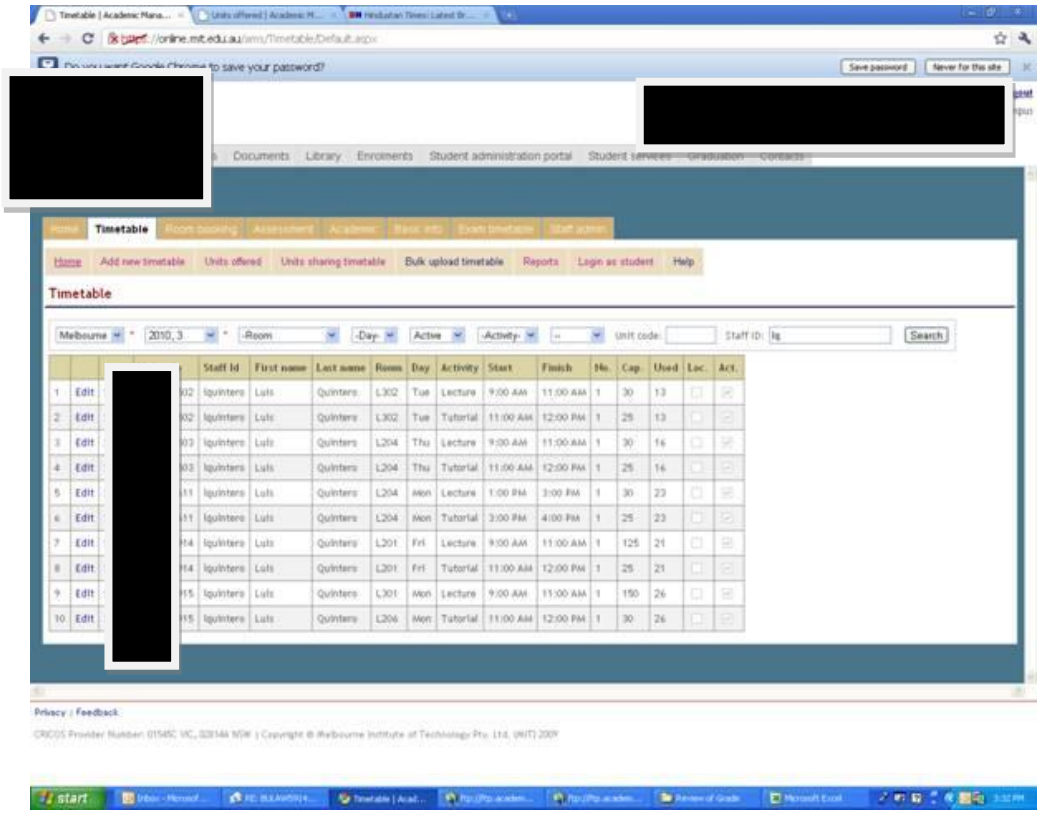



*Figure 27.* Typical lecturer/tutor timetable for Partner C, displaying student attendance numbers.

The first question I put to the focus groups was "544 students were enrolled in the commercial law course over the two teaching periods in 2009 surveyed. In Teaching Period 1, 2009, 283 students, out of a possible 364, did not access or submit the online assessment. Why did this occur?" The answers from the Partner C group in in Sydney were mixed and varied. The students' replies included the following comments:

> *We didn't study like this in our home country.*

*We don't know how to use the internet.*

*It was too hard.*

*Didn't know how to use Blackboard.*

*It was suggested that we don't need to do this…*

*Hadn't been given training on Blackboard.*

*Couldn't find it on the intranet.*

*Waste of time for five marks.*

These comments led to further discussions at Partner C in Sydney. Below, I have extracted some of the more salient portions of the conversation. My comments and questions are in italics. In some of the quotations, I have combined individual answers into a group response as several students were usually speaking at the same time. On some occasions, however, I was able to name specific speakers.

DS: *You said you don't study like this in your own country. How is it so different from your home country?*

Edited group response: *In India all the undergraduate degrees are offered by colleges attached to the university. When you enrol there, you are given all the materials you will ever need to pass the degree in course material books. These are photocopies of books, articles, past exams and the lecture notes, all spiral bound. We don't need to do anything else. We don't need to learn an online system or even go to a library. We usually get together in groups and just do the work.*

DS: *Don't you have problems with plagiarism?*

Group response: *We had never heard of plagiarism until we came to Australia. I don't see why it's such a big deal; everyone does it. It's just the ones you pick on that get into trouble.*

DS: *So, you didn't work individually?*

Group response: *No, we always work in groups. That was how we tried to do the online test. But you cheated us, and every test was different. That's not fair … how do we know that everyone is getting equal questions? This was a very unfair test. It was very frustrating, so we gave up.*

DS: *The test questions in Teaching Period 1 were randomised to stop students cheating.*

Group response: *But what is cheating if we do the work and get the right answers? You were just trying to make it harder so that fewer of us passed. You get more money if we fail.*

DS: *Well, I get paid the same whether you pass or fail … but I stand a better chance of keeping my job if you pass. But how do I know who is capable of doing the work if you all collaborate? This is called credibility of the degree. Your employers need to know that each*

*of you can perform the tasks needed when they hire you. If we can't show that, then they will not hire Newgarth graduates.*

Group response: *You could do this with a paper test, and everyone would get the same questions.*

DS: *But the government requires that we have more online content, and I need to assess how each of you is going.*

Group response: *So, you are spying on us for the Government.*

*DS: No, just trying to see the best way to introduce online assessments.*

Group response: *Don't you think that it's not fair to experiment on us?*

DS: *In Teaching Period 2, there was no difficulty with the online assessment.*

Group response: *No, it was the same questions for everyone, and we could work together.*

DS: *Let's move on to the next question. You say you don't know how to use the internet, but the responses say that 95% have access to it at home?*

Group response: *My flat mates have it, but I can never get on; they are always playing some game or other.*

DS: *How do you contact your friends and families in your home countries?*

Group response: *We use our smartphones.*

DS: *You phone your family … isn't that expensive?*

Group response: *No, we use these apps like Skype.*

DS: *But isn't that using the internet?*

Group response: *No, it's on our phones when we have Wi-Fi connections.*

[A male student interjects:] *I've tried to explain it to ******, but she is adamant that it's on her phone.*

A hearty but inappropriate exchange followed about the inability of the female students to understand the technical aspects of the internet. I stopped this discussion with a change of subject; however, the stereotyping of the male/female roles in the group was interesting, and it was something I wanted to explore later.

The next question was as follows:

DS: *Why did you think using Blackboard was too hard?*

Group response: *It was very difficult to access … the hyperlink in the materials took us to the Newgarth home page but we had to log out of Partner C's system and then log onto the internet with Internet Explorer.*

[A student interjects:] *… so that's why I couldn't find it … that's just dumb. It should be with our materials, not yours.*

[Another student continues:] *If we did this at the school [partner institution], we were using our own allocation of internet allowance. If we go over our allowance, we have to pay … we have to buy a larger allowance. When we get to Newgarth University, we have to log in with our Newgarth IDs and passwords. Most of us have forgotten these if we ever had them. This takes time to get sorted, and we are being charged for this. The Newgarth system is so slow, and usually we get booted off as the pages are not responding. It was just too difficult to access. We hadn't been given any training on Blackboard. Sure, we can work it out. But it's not intuitive the way it was set up. It takes time to work through things. For 10 marks the time involved was just not worth it.*

DS: *But you are required to attempt all assessments. To not do so could prevent you from passing.*

Group response: *Yeah … we talked about that and the academic adviser here told us that Newgarth would never fail us for not attempting a 10-mark assessment. The Ombudsman would never allow, it so just don't worry about it.*

DS: *So, you were advised not to undertake the test?*

Group response: *Yeah. If we were going to fail because of 10 marks, we would just appeal. We nearly always win appeals as Newgarth doesn't like the publicity of going to the Ombudsman.*

At similar focus groups at Partner C in Sydney, the matter of non-return of the survey forms was put to the students. It appeared that the students had conducted the survey and the forms had been duly collected (but the forms were never returned to the researcher). The students in the focus group suggested that very few of them had actually accessed the Newgarth LMS, and they had not been encouraged to do so by the lecturers at that institution.

DS: *A small group of male students in their 30s said that they had refused to access Blackboard as it was a racist program. The name "Black", they asserted, was aimed at international students. You are aware that domestic students at Newgarth also use this system? So, what is the name of the slate board that is used in Indian classrooms to write on with chalk?*

Group response: *Blackboards … but most of these boards are green, so it doesn't count.*

[One angry young man interjects:] *Why are you wasting time interviewing us and asking us these questions? It will have no impact on our situation.*

DS: *We need this information to help other students.*

Group response: *Yes, but not us. We don't benefit from this, so why waste our time? This is not what we pay for. Newgarth should do its research with its own time and money.*

DS: *We truly do not wish to waste your time; this forum is voluntary. Please feel free to leave if you want to. We need to improve the units … better for anyone who may be taking them, or needs to take them again. So why do you think that there was a very small response to the [survey] question on ethnicity?*

[Only one student made to move, then stopped to answer the next question.]

Group response: *Many of us left India and Nepal to escape the caste system. To identify with it in a survey would be to accept that the system had not been left behind. Ethnicity is not an identifier of our culture; that is done by our religion or families. Ethnicity just shows the place in society we were born into … an accident of birth.*

[Second student interjects:] *I am Sri Lankan, and there seems to be a real prejudice against us here, even more than if we were from India. The Pakistani students feel the same. We … I … left my country to escape the violence where we were singled out. We do not want to be differentiated from the main group of students. We want to be identified only as international students, not singled out according to our background and that. You don't do that with the domestic students, so why us?* [the rest of the group agreed]

DS: *That is a very good point. So, do you think that this has anything to do with why we have a ratio of two males to one female studying?*

Group response:

[Male late 30s:] *In my case, I am the head of the family and have come to study in Australia to gain my permanent residency. Once this has been achieved, my family will be sent for.*

[Younger male:] *We are simply trying for a better life in Australia. I had financial difficulties in India, and I am looking for a new start in Australia. I had a franchise. If I can get permanent residency, I can start that franchise here and make a good living.*

[Younger female:] *I am just trying to have a different life to my mum and dad. They saved up to send me here so that I can see the world and do what I want to.*

[Second younger female:] *I wouldn't have gone to university if I hadn't come to Australia with my husband. I would not have had the opportunity. The head of the family is more important.*

[Third younger female:] *And that's the culture I'm trying to get away from.*

*DS: I know that you all work very hard for your goals, and it's not easy being an international student in Australia. That is why I asked about employment in the survey. The survey revealed that 65% of students work 15 hours a week or more. There seemed to be more students working in Sydney than Melbourne, although we didn't receive as many responses from Sydney. This seems out of balance, and not what I hear from my conversations with you. Any thoughts on why this may be the case?*

Group response: *Everyone who lives in Sydney has to work. It's so expensive. Most of us work about 20 to 25 hours a week. With the study and travelling on top of that, it pretty much takes up all our time. We all have to travel a lot as no one can afford to live in the CBD except the Chinese students.*

*DS: Why is that?*

Group response: *Just go up to World Square. The Chinese own half of those apartments there. Mummy and Daddy buy the apartment for an investment and allow their little girls to live there while studying, and then sell them off at a profit … the apartments, that is. (Lots of laughter from the group) Bet Mummy and Daddy don't know what goes on there, though (lots more laughter from the group). We don't have that. We work in 7/11s, the Metro and Macca's to just stay alive.*

[Second student:] *"My friend in Melbourne tells me that lots of students there work full time. They just do not get good pay. Of course, we are not allowed to work full time, so they don't stay.* [There was general agreement with this statement.]

No students at any of the partner institutions had received grants, awards or scholarships.

DS: *Okay, we have covered the Blackboard login problems. Why had nobody logged into Blackboard before the commercial law unit?*

Group response: *Nobody had asked us to. Blackboard was not required in any other unit, so why bother?*

[Individual student:] *Bit of a waste of time really; why bother just for one unit?*

[Another student:] *We are not really Newgarth students. They just take the money. You are the only person we ever see from there. You try to help us, and we like to help you, but it really isn't anything to do with the degree.* [General agreement from the group.] *We don't really like Blackboard; it doesn't have any relevance for us. The [partner] site is much more*

*relevant to Sydney, and it's easier to use. The Newgarth site is a nightmare and we can never get any help. So, we give up. It's just not needed or relevant.*

One aspect of the students' behaviour I found interesting was that the female Indian students in the groups at Partner C and Partner D tended to divide themselves into two categories: "girls" were unmarried females under the age of 25 (or thereabout as very few would admit to their age); "women" were married and/or over the age of 25. I found the first of the categories pertained to students who were usually exceptionally bright and intelligent. This group tended to outshine their male counterparts. The female students related that girls and women in this group had either been sent by families to escape the caste system of India or managed to attain enough resources to leave.

The second category of females at Partner C and Partner D – the women – appeared largely to consist of wives, girlfriends and daughters of successful businessmen. They wanted a university degree but could not gain entry to the major Australian universities. There were exceptions to this generalisation. For example, one very bright and articulate young woman said she simply wanted to attend university with other Indian students, where she felt safe.

The focus group session at Partner C in Melbourne was much less formal than the other groups. Due to logistics, this group was organised outside of lecture hours. Ethical concerns, and the possibility that I may influence the group, dictated that the discussion was held after I was no longer involved in teaching or assessing any of them. The focus group was conducted in the summer school period. Unfortunately, other classes were running, which prevented some students from attending the focus group, and some students had taken the opportunity to work over summer or to return home. The focus group was held in one of the lecture rooms during the day and about eighteen students attended. The session was not recorded as the students were uncomfortable with that. I was allowed to take notes.

I asked about the issue of the name Blackboard being racist. I was told that this was a claim made by a bunch of *try-hards* attempting to be clever. According to the focus group participants, if these try-hards could show that the test was racist they could protest and get it cancelled. Group members explained that every institution was "scared of the race card" and would do anything to avoid it. They suggested that the try-hards may even get pass grades for the units on the basis of such spurious objections. The consensus of the group was that these people were idiots.

One of the most interesting comments made during the Melbourne focus groups was in relation to working hours. The bulk of non-returns of the survey questionnaires were from the Sydney region. The representation of students for the survey was thus weighted in favour of the Melbourne students by a ratio of 2 to 1 – twice as many Melbourne students returned the survey as did those from Sydney. I had expected that the survey would indicate that twice as many students were working in Melbourne compared to those in Sydney. However, according to the returned survey questionnaires, the concentration of students working was revealed to be in Sydney. This finding was surprising and somewhat concerning. It suggested that if the results of the survey were reliable, then three times as many students were working in Sydney than their counterparts in Melbourne. It is true that the students at Partner A in Melbourne were generally working less than the students at the other Melbourne campuses. However, this small number of students was not enough to explain the disparity in the figures.

The question of why there seemed to me more students working in Sydney was put to the Melbourne students. They were hesitant at first to comment. The reason became clear that most of the males, Indian males in particular, were working well over the allocated number of hours

permitted by their visa conditions. Some students were working up to forty or fifty hours per week. The students in the group told stories of how, in some cases, they would work in return for accommodation and food, or how they were paid about $8 an hour under the table; that is, they were paid in cash (the minimum Australian hourly wage in 2016 was A$16.87 before tax).

The most notorious employer was the Melbourne Metro, which paid minimum wages and demanded students undertake sixty hours of shift work a week, cleaning carriages and stations, or they would not be rostered on again. The fast-food chains were similar. If you turned down a shift, you were punished by not being rostered on for a couple of weeks. The anecdotal evidence from these students suggested that the cash culture and exploitation of student labour was greater in Melbourne than it was in Sydney. However, the students affected said they were hesitant to be forthcoming about their exploitative work conditions for fear of retribution and losing income; or worse, fear of being reported to the Immigration Department and being deported for breaching their visa regulations.

This situation of students working long hours could be viewed in terms of the negative impact on the students. The students obviously were spending valuable study time working. This could be seen as having a possible impact on their grades and ability to perform academically. The reason that the students felt it necessary to work long hours was also important. Working for the minimum wage or below, the number of hours the students had to spend at work simply to support themselves was well over the twenty hours a week that their student visas permitted. This made the students vulnerable to exploitation – a fact the students were particularly aware of. The perception of international students' position in Melbourne, then, was a mosaic of apparent exploitation from the partner institutions, Newgarth University, the Immigration Department, and the general public. Cap this off with the unabashed open hostility towards international students at that time, and there was a receipt for constant suspicion and retaliation. A specific example of this type of exploitation was given to me after the focus group at Partner C.

Three of the younger girls approached me after the Melbourne focus group session at Partner C. They asked if they could speak to me confidentially. They did not want the rest of the group to hear their stories. However, they agreed that I could write about them if I would guarantee that they would not be identified. They told how they were *encouraged* to work in illegal massage parlours by local operators who knew their families back in India. The threat was that the operators would tell their families of their sexual relationships in Australia unless they submitted to becoming sex workers. The girls said they were afraid of being disowned by their families or, even worse, suffer retribution if they did not cooperate.

These were young women from less affluent families who had been sent to Australia to escape the caste system in India. They did not want any of this being recorded. I asked if there was anything I could do, or if there was something they wanted me to do. The girls said that they had matters under control. They feared the police or immigration officials causing them problems. I assured them that I would not publish anything they told me until they had graduated. (There were the same young women that Gitika and Lovepreet had previously sought to help).

By comparison with the students at Partner C and Partner D, the students who participated in the focus group at Partner A were less vocal than those from the other focus groups. They were much more accommodating and accepting of Newgarth University. There was no animosity towards Newgarth University or myself, and the idea of working online was apparently not regarded as problematic by these students. When I conducted the focus group at Partner A, the student participants, without exception, had sophisticated laptops connected to the institution's wireless

network. They, too, had initial login issues in accessing Blackboard; however, there was a very good IT consultant on hand to help with these problems on an individual basis.

By the time I held the focus group at the end of Teaching Period 2, in 2009, all participants said they could access Blackboard with little difficulty. The lecturer at Partner A had also been very accommodating and supportive of the introduction of the online assessment. Under his guidance, the students saw the online test as a normal part of their studies. Apart from the student who forgot to submit, apparently due to partying too hard and forgetting the deadline, to the great amusement of his fellow students, no other problems were reported.

The comparison between these two groups of Melbourne students, with just two city blocks separating their institutions, was quite dramatic. Not one of the conflicts and community problems that was apparent at Partner C was evident at Partner A. Not once were the police or the Immigration Department mentioned in the conversations; neither was the issue of permanent residency that was so prevalent and all-consuming at Partners C and D. Unlike their counterparts at Partners C and D, the predominantly Chinese students at Partner A were proud of their ethnicity and their home provinces. The minority Russian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Mongolian students said they were equally proud of their cultural heritage.

I observed that the Partner A students displayed none of the suspicion displayed at Partners C and D towards the survey in relation to caste and position in society. Nor was there any attempt from the Partner A students to use ethnicity or culture for personal gain. My observations revealed quite the opposite. The students at Partner A revelled in the ethnic and cultural mix of the institution and the wider Melbourne community. While I did not observe any attempt to integrate into the Melbourne community and lose their sense of individual identity by becoming simply Australians, there was a good deal of conversation about inclusiveness in society and joining in. This involved things like the many and various festivals held in Melbourne and going on weekend ski trips and other excursions.

The immense pressure displayed by the students at Partners C and D to earn a living did not even appear to be an issue at Partner A. There seemed to be little issue with work hours amongst these students as very few of them said they were engaged in paid work, and those in the group who did work said they were employed by friends or family. I also noticed a correlation between the gender ratio in the focus group amongst the Chinese and eastern European students. The ratio was almost 1 to 1. The students were equally represented by males and females, unlike the predominantly Indian students at Partners C and D. The importance of the male head of the family working for a better life or the young women being escapees from the gender oppression did not appear to be issues in the Partner A group.

This lack of financial and moral obligation to other people provided the students at Partner A with a freedom to direct energy and focus to both studying and enjoying the international student experience; that did not seem present for the majority of the students in the 2009 cohort. This lack of stress and pressure may have also accounted for the lack of animosity towards Newgarth University and the acceptance of the online material.

#### 6.3.1 Summary of responses to the focus group questions.

I have summarised the collective responses to the questions put to all the focus groups and have outlined them in this section.

All three hundred and fourteen students who returned survey forms were full-fee-paying international students. There were differences in relation to their visa status in that temporary residency had been granted on humanitarian grounds to some Sri Lankan students (Refugee Visas);

however, such students were still full-fee-paying international students. The students on temporary residency visas could still apply for permanent residency if they met the immigration requirements.

The students who disclosed their ethnicity as requested in the survey were predominantly Chinese. The non-response to this question by the majority of students may be seen as an answer in itself. As revealed in the discussions of the focus groups, the responses suggested that students from the south Asian regions did not see ethnicity as a basis for their culture but rather as an identifier of caste or social standing. The students in the focus groups at both Partners C and D in Melbourne and Sydney were predominantly from middle-caste origins looking to change their standing in Australia's egalitarian society. To have given an answer to this question may have, in the students' perception, perpetuated caste distinctions. It may have also given an insight into the background and demographics of the students concerned.

When discussing the ratio of males to females in the combined cohort there were some variations. As mentioned previously, the ratio at Partner A was almost 1 to 1. The ratio at the other partner institutions was two males to every one female. Many of the Indian and Nepalese male students said that they had borrowed heavily from sources in their country of origin in order to attain an Australian degree and thus qualify for permanent residency.

The female Indian and Nepalese students tended to be funded more by their families. However, there were also several females who had saved hard to raise tuition fees. It was said in the focus groups that it was harder for females to get bank loans for their Australian education. Quantitative evidence from the survey results suggested that almost no student in this study possessed any accounting experience or background. From my observations of the students over the four-year period, it was evident that those students wishing to gain permanent residency in Australia were encouraged to enrol in accounting degrees as these were desirable requirements for Australian citizenship. I had also observed over the period of the study that the majority of students tended to be Indian and Nepalese males looking to break the cultural capital cycle from the south Asian caste system to establish new family groups in Australia. This accounted for the large classes at Partners C and D in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.

In relation to the finding that 65% of students worked 15 hours a week or more, with the concentration being in Sydney, the responses from the students suggested that the cash culture and exploitation of student labour was greater in Melbourne than it was in Sydney. Students in Melbourne were rather hesitant to talk freely about the number of hours they were working for fear of losing income or being reported to the Immigration Department.

From my observations, it seemed that the students at Partner A did not appear to be faced with financial problems to the same extent. I had observed that the eastern European students were generally self-funded but better prepared for Australian life than their Indian and Nepalese counterparts. I had observed that the Chinese students at Partner A tended on average to appear to be well funded. They had expensive electronic equipment, wore designer clothes and frequently talked of travelling holidays and owning expensive cars. The students in Sydney were also working long hours, which was evident from their answers to the survey, my personal observations and the responses to the focus group questions. However, from my observations and conversations with these students there did not seem to be the same level of exploitation. There was certainly none of the horror stories from Sydney that had been disclosed in Melbourne.

- Only 125 of the 315 students had any computer experience apart from use of the internet.

The students who attended the focus groups had a reasonable understanding of computers, with some being very conversant. The students at Partner A had technical support, which improved their understanding. There was the interesting discussion about Wi-Fi and mobile phones not being on the internet, which tended to colour just what level of understanding was actually held. However, most students in the focus groups admitted to having extensive experience in programs such as Microsoft Office, but not indicating this in the survey in case more online assessment was planned.

- Approximately 90% of students had access to and used the internet at home.

  It appeared that most of the students used web-based social networking systems such as Facebook and Twitter at home in Australia. Most students are able to communicate by email and were conversant with programs such as Skype.

- 50% of students found that Blackboard was a valuable tool.

  Although approximately half of the students in the survey said that they found that Blackboard was a valuable tool, this proportion was somewhat less for participants in the focus groups. Most of the latter claimed there was no actual point in using Blackboard. Most indicated that the only reason they accessed Blackboard was to do the assessment, otherwise they would not have bothered.

- 65% of students had login problems.

  The comments from the focus group participants suggested that the login problems occurred at two stages. The initial login to the Newgarth University web system was difficult and clumsy. The students recalled that in the first year they enrolled, their enrolment was late due to the arrangement made by the agents for cheaper airfares. Enrolment could not take place until the students were physically at the partner institutions, and that their confirmation of enrolment had been sighted by administration staff. When students enrolled late, they did not automatically receive their Newgarth University student cards that contained their login details. This prevented automatic enrolment on the LMS. To get the login details required, the students had to personally contact the administration at Newgarth University. They found the help desks particularly unsupportive and difficult to contact. This deterred many students from using the LMS.

- 100% of the surveys returned claimed the students logged on to Blackboard for the first time in the commercial law units.

  Regardless of what semester of study the students were in, all who accessed the LMS did so for the first time in the commercial law units such as commercial law, introduction to legal systems, company law, and taxation law. Interviews suggested that there was no requirement or compulsion to access the LMS in any other MPA course.

- 209 students (66%) logged on to Blackboard for the first time to undertake the assessment.

  As above, there was no real compulsion to log on to Blackboard other than to take the law assessments.

- 53% of students preferred the partner institutions' intranet on the I - drives to Blackboard.

  Most of the students who participated in the focus groups claimed that the local intranets of the partner institutions were more relevant and useful to their study than what they described as the "disassociated Blackboard." One student commented: *The LMS was too difficult to use. It was not intuitive. Why couldn't they have a system like Facebook that everyone can use?*

It initially appeared that the majority of students were not in favour of using an off-campus LMS, and that they regarded it as not time efficient for them to learn a new system. It would also appear that, without technical and academic support being available on location at the partner institutions, an online assessment was detrimental and disadvantageous to students at the partner institutions at that time. That being said, the technical competence of the students at Partner A indicated that with technical support, the students could perform well.

This finding raised problems of equivalence. The domestic students at Newgarth University had the advantage of technical and academic support. From these students, there was 100% compliance with the online requirement and 100% take up of the online assessment. Thus, to maintain equivalence between students at the Newgarth University campus and students at the various partner institutions, a method needed to be devised that would remove the antagonism towards Newgarth University from students at the partner institutions. This could have been facilitated if all students were provided with technical support and encouraged to participate in all of Newgarth's academic activities.

The discussions during the focus groups revealed that the problems with acceptance of an online assessment were far more complex than I had originally suspected. There was a great deal of antagonism from the predominantly Indian students towards Newgarth University. Many students came to Australia to seek better lives. For some, the reality was that they were in a worse situation, facing the prospect of returning to their countries of origin with no future prospects and heavily in debt. This antagonism tended to colour the students' perceptions of Newgarth University, its motives and actions. It created a "them and us" situation, where the students collectively resented Newgarth University.

## 6.4 The Episodic Interviews

Six students volunteered to participated in individual interviews (see section 3.5.7). One student withdrew before the process started. A second student was failing the course. She withdrew from the interviews and returned to India. Four students completed the interview process. They chose the following pseudonyms:

- Domani, who is a Sri Lankan-born lawyer
- Victor, who is an Indian car accessory franchise holder from Delhi
- Sofie, who is an MBA graduate. She worked as a bank officer for a large Indian corporation.
- Vanessa, who is an Emirati from Dubai. She was a clerk who worked in her father's currency conversion company.

The interviews were conducted after the focus groups but prior to the data being analysed (see Appendix C for the episodic interview sheet that contained the questions). The volunteers were all from the original cohort in Teaching Period 1, where the online test was conducted. At this stage, I was still convinced that Newgarth University's actions had caused the non-submission of the assignment, and the interviews conducted were predicated on this assumption. In keeping with the format of episodic interviewing, the interviews were based on three periods of the volunteers' lives:

- Their early home backgrounds
- Their work experiences
- Their education experiences

There were also questions regarding what these participants thought education meant and what their thoughts were on technology. These questions were designed to probe the past lives of the volunteers to determine what similarity they had in their educational backgrounds. Specifically, what was in their collective histories that would make them resist blended learning and an online assessment?

All the volunteers were well educated and, may I say, exceptionally nice people. Sofie had gained an MBA, Victor a Master of Finance, Vanessa had a BA in statistics, and Domani had gained an LLB and had been a practising lawyer.

Sofie and Victor were from Delhi in India, Domani from Sri Lanka, and Vanessa from Dubai. Domani was the only volunteer who had not taken a business-related degree previously, although she said she had always had an interest in accounting.

According to the volunteers, all of their parents were well educated. Victor's parents worked in government. Sofie's father was a commissioned officer in the Indian navy. Domani's mother and father were schoolteachers, and Vanessa's father was an accountant who owned and operated a currency exchange business in Dubai.

The volunteers all stated that they had siblings who had also studied to progress themselves.

With the exception of Domani, the volunteers said they had studied at more than one training institution. Victor and Sofie's English was excellent and Domani and Vanessa had good English skills.

Domani and Victor came to Australia to study, with the intention of qualifying to stay in Australia as permanent residents. Vanessa did not want to stay in Australia. Sofie came with her husband. Sofie, Domani, and Victor took the MPA as an accounting degree is given priority in the immigration points system. In Sofie's case, it was doubtful whether she required these points as she was in Australia on a spousal visa with her husband, who was sponsored in a highly important position. Her motive for studying at the partner institution seemed more for social reasons than academic.

Vanessa was raised in Deria, a suburb of Dubai. Deria in the 1960s was a small outer village of Dubai on the Dubai Creek. Today, it has been redeveloped into a thriving enterprise hub. Vanessa's family had always lived in the area and had benefited greatly from its economic growth. Vanessa had the opportunity to attend high-performing schools and a private university, the American University of Asia. Now called the American University of Dubai, it is one of the foremost universities in the United Arab Emirates and focuses on business studies. While it is an independent institution, it has links to similar universities throughout the world. Vanessa says her father agreed to pay for her to study in Australia so as she could gain the best possible education. Always with a view to working in the

family business, Vanessa took the MPA as this was the cheapest Master of Accounting degree she could find in Australia. She said it did not matter to her that the CPA did not recognise the degree when it was taught at a partner institution of Newgarth University as she did not intend to stay in Australia. Vanessa was the only volunteer who, she says, planned from the outset to return to her home.

Vanessa stated that she enjoyed Curtin University in Western Australia far more than Partner A in Melbourne. Unfortunately, Curtin University did not offer the MPA. Vanessa attributed her feelings about studying in Melbourne mainly to the lack of a multicultural mix at the partner institution compared to that which she had encountered in Dubai and at Curtin University. As the only Emirati in the class, she was in a minority and felt she was segregated somewhat by the predominantly Indian students. She often called the institution by its colloquial nickname of "Little Bombay." Vanessa was quite vocal on the point that most of the Indian students at the partner institution retained their Indian habits and customs and rejected Australian customs, especially in relation to food.

Vanessa claimed that the Indian students at Partner A were a close-knit community and tended to marginalise students of other nationalities. Vanessa confided that this made her a little more ruthless in her attitude towards the other students. She would purposely seek out only those students who could help her to advance her studies but did not socialise with them. She felt that the Indian students at the institution were generally aggressive and intense, focusing more on their place in the wider Australian community than their studies. This made Melbourne a lonely place for her. Vanessa would leave Melbourne at every opportunity to visit friends elsewhere in Australia because of this. Vanessa was so intent on telling me of her feelings of isolation and their root cause that her interview took over four hours in two separate sessions.

Domani grew up in a poor rural area of Sri Lanka, where the availability of technology was intermittent at best. She related that the electricity supply to her village was temperamental and prone to long outages; which was accepted as normal. Domani said that her upbringing was supportive without being overbearingly academic or stressful. Domani told of her introduction to university and law school. While she described the stress of legal study and the requirement to undertake a great deal of research and reading, she believed that this was not uncommon for a traditional common law legal education. It was not until recently that legal searches could be completed successfully online. Even now, there is very little material pre-1980 that has been converted to digital form. In the law libraries of Sri Lanka, according to Domani, there were always clerks who knew almost everything, and if not, the librarians knew where to find the required information. Domani felt that until she arrived in Australia, everyone she knew regarded computers and technical gadgets as something of a luxury. Now, she would not be seen in public without her phone and could not comprehend studying without a laptop. However, she said, she misses the old ways of research.

Domani made the point early in the interview that she liked the way the commercial law course was taught but saw no reason to include the online assessment task. It was not really part of the course, she said, and was not needed for the continuity. She saw it as an add-on that was quite annoying in an otherwise enjoyable course. Domani, like Vanessa, regarded the large proportion of Indian students as a close-knit community who tended to exclude students of other nationalities. This did not bother Domani too much. Her legal education had been of a traditional competitive type of study (where each student competes against the others for a limited number of places in each year) that trained her to be able to work autonomously. She, like Vanessa, was able to pick and choose her study group partners if she wished.

Victor was an entrepreneur who had come to Australia with a plan. He owned and operated a car accessory franchise in Delhi. With the very large population there, he felt that there was too much competition. His plan was to gain permanent residency in Australia and then open branches of his franchise here. He says his parents struggled to get ahead in Delhi but that, finally, working through the ranks of government employees, they became division managers. Their housing situation also changed with their work status. Originally, Victor's family lived with his grandparents, eventually getting ahead enough to own their own house.

Victor's success with study and academia seemed to follow this pattern. He was unremarkable in primary and intermediate, even having to be kept back a year. His situation then changed with the progress of his parents. When his parents moved, Victor was able to attend a much better school. He improved so much that he was promoted through two years of school. This success continued into university, where he managed to complete a BA and a Master of Finance in four years by the time he was 23. He left academia for a business career and purchased a franchise. At the age of 27, he decided to make the move to Australia. Partner Institution C in Melbourne offered him the most cost-effective opportunity to gain permanent residency and to create networks for his business ventures. He was always very interested in the lack of legislative structures for franchises under the then Trade Practices Act, and the proposed provisions under the ACL to be enacted in 2010. Victor was a popular Indian student and was sought after to join with others to create study groups.

Sofie was an intelligent young woman. She, like Victor, was from Delhi. She related that she had had a reasonably privileged life. Her father, a career naval officer, was able to provide extremely well for her family. Her brothers followed their father into naval service. Sofie stated that her father and brothers were always studying to gain better skills and promotion. Study and education were a natural and normal part of her home life. She found school and academic work easy, preferring to maintain a good social life. Sofie continued from school to college and then to university, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce and a Master of Business Administration.

In India, she worked as a sales manager for one of the country's largest banks before travelling to Australia with her husband. He was also in the banking industry. Sofie specifically chose Partner C over other universities in Victoria due to the large numbers of Indian students there. She wanted the social interaction with other young Indian people. Sofie's intelligence and social presence gave her lots of opportunities to participate in study groups. She possessed an almost eidetic memory that she relied on to minimise study and maximise socialising.

A fifth volunteer withdrew from the study as she was failing the course. This necessitated meetings with counsellors, academic advisors, and immigration agents. The time taken for this made it very difficult to schedule an interview. The student returned to India at the end of the semester.

The volunteers came from very varied socioeconomic backgrounds and different countries around the world. They were of a similar age. Victor and Sofie had previously attained master's degrees. Domani had completed a four-year Bachelor of Law and gained a Graduate Certificate of Legal Practice. It is not uncommon for legal practitioners to forgo further academic study in favour of pursuing professional development qualifications in particular areas of specialty and expertise. Domani specialised in criminal law and had defended a client accused of murder. This is a rare occurrence for a young lawyer.

Vanessa had wanted to pursue a career in statistics. However, her father had promised to pay only for an accounting degree, and this was on the proviso that she returned to the family firm after graduating. Vanessa had agreed to the proviso that she study outside of Dubai. She paid for a

Masters of Statistics at Curtin University herself and finished this while starting the MPA in Melbourne, effectively condensing the two degrees into three years.

All of the volunteers were asked what they thought that the word “education” meant and what were their thoughts on technology.

Domani, Victor, and Sofie all maintained that education was integral to family life. None of them could imagine family life without there being some form of education-related activity being central. This may only be that, in each case, the prosperity of the family depended on academic success. So much so, that education was a way of life. Vanessa hated education and was forced to study as a young girl at home after school. She recalled how she just wanted to go out and play as a child but was forced to study. Vanessa is multi-lingual and speaks Arabic, Persian, French and English. Vanessa made a distinction between education and learning. She felt that education was related to a profession or career, whereas learning was something you did prior to college or university. All interviewees felt that they were still on an education journey.

Of the volunteers, only Vanessa was undertaking the MPA degree with a plan to work in a particular job – that of her father’s business. Domani and Victor were both undertaking the degree in order to satisfy Australian permanent residency requirements. Sofie was undecided as to what she would utilise her degree for.

All of the volunteers had been influenced by their parents’ desires to advance in society by academic means. Sofie was influenced by career naval officers; Victor by career government officers; Vanessa by her father’s business growth; and Domani by her schoolteacher parents. They all had supportive families who believed academia was a way of gaining financial and social status. With the exception of Domani, all had the availability of the latest technology such as the internet, laptops, smartphones and tablets as they became available. Domani was introduced to these on her arrival in Australia in 2007 and now considers them an integral part of her life, profession and education.

Technology, surprisingly, meant much the same thing to all the volunteers. Technology was computers and electronic gadgets. Victor saw computer technology as the basis of everything. This was how society now advanced. Vanessa and Sofie tended to see technology advancements as the latest fashion accessories, as useful tools, but they had to look good and enhance one’s lifestyle. Domani was more pragmatic and regarded technology as a powerful communication and research tool. Domani was concerned that an over-emphasis on technology in the legal and accounting professions could actually reduce innovation in the field, with practitioners relying too much on the tool to do the work and not enough on why we needed the tools in the first place. I pushed the volunteers to see if technology could mean anything else, such as education. All volunteers asserted that modern education in Australia had become so dependent on computer technology that it was the same thing.

I have attempted to reduce the salient points of the qualitative interviews into a tabular format (see Table 7) to note where areas of similarity occur.

Table 7

Interviewees' Similarities

| Category | Sofie | Victor | Domani | Vanessa |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Education* | | | | |
| Postgraduate | X | X | X | X |
| *Occupation* | | | | |
| Lawyer | X | | | |
| Business | | X | | |
| Finance | | | X | X |
| *Nationality* | | | | |
| Indian | | X | X | |
| Sri Lankan | X | | | |
| Emerati | | | | X |
| *Parents* | | | | |
| Schoolteacher | | | X | |
| Business | | | | X |
| Government worker | X | X | | |
| *Siblings* | X | X | X | X |
| *Permanent residency* | | X | X | |

It can be seen at a glance that there is little similarity among the volunteers. The only constant is the effect that their parents' views on education had on them. In each case, the volunteers had been raised in a family situation where study and education were not only encouraged but also seen as a fundamental way of life.

The one consistent theme to emerge from all the interviews was the necessity to form study groups. Sofie had these almost as a right from her entourage. Victor believed he was a born leader, so others would follow. Vanessa and Domani were more discerning, saying they deliberately set out to become part of groups that were beneficial to them. It was this focus on study groups that was the defining moment in this study. This need for collegial support was the one constant theme throughout all the data collection, including the meetings with the partner institution managers. The issue was about formation of groups and alliances and alignment of these groups.

## 6.5 Summary and Conclusions

*"What went wrong?"* For the first time, I was seeing that there was more to the resistance to the online test than simply a matter of everyone having a different test. In Melbourne, a focus group of 10 students all responded that the name Blackboard had racist connotations; that this was the electronic medium for the "blacks." It was established in the focus groups that a blackboard or chalkboard is known by the same term in both India and Bangladesh. It was widely agreed in the focus groups that the term Blackboard had no racist connotations and that this was just a ploy. In the

Melbourne focus group, the participants claimed that the group of 10 students were attempting to use the race card for their own benefit as the focus group described it.

It was widely known by the students that on many occasions during the period of this study, a large number of appeals by students against academic misconduct were taken to university appeals committees. If a claim of racism was made in the appeal, most, if not all, of the academic misconduct charges were dropped by Newgarth University. The focus group suggested that the group of ten was just using the system to avoid being failed. The group of ten students' comments should be considered in the context of the 2009/10 political climate and the attacks at that time on, and the assaults and deaths of, members of the international student populations in both Sydney and Melbourne. This being said, it was a sad indictment upon the University that racism was seen in some quarters simply as a tool to be used by students to gain appeal leverage. It is important to note that however speculative the students' answers may have appeared to have been, their survey responses were their perceptions and, as such, must be considered an indication of some underlying truth as they perceived it.

*"How can we understand what happened here?"* A claim of racism (even a bogus one) against the name of a teaching tool could point to a level of insecurity and perceived segregation of these students. The local political context of racial clashes between Indian students and other ethnic minorities in Melbourne's outer suburbs at that time no doubt coloured the students' perceptions. The perception, though, was not confined to suburban unrest. As mentioned previously, the racial and cultural situation was complex for the students. This racial tension situation had been abused by members within the students' own racial and ethnic communities. In the situation of the three girls mentioned previously, the encouragement to work illegally in the sex industry further segregated them from their families in India and created barriers of distrust within their own community in Melbourne.

For many of my students who were victims of racial vilification or even abuse from their own communities, this distrust became invasive. The students had a perception of being segregated and isolated from the community at large and collected together in student groups where they felt safety in numbers and support for their fears. This distrust was also levelled at Newgarth University. When a change in teaching delivery was presented to the students, they perceived this as, yet another racial restriction placed on already-stressed international students. I admit I had not foreseen the possibility that the students' perceptions of the use of an LMS, combined with online assessment in blended-learning delivery terms, would be seen as "Big Brotherish" and controlling rather than pastoral and supportive. However, the students' perceptions were consistent with Battye and Carter's (2009) assertions as to the rollout of blended learning.

Battye and Carter (2009), Ng and Tsoi (2008), and Skelton (2009), argue that the use of an LMS had to be demonstrated to be more than just supplementary to a course before the students would become willing to engage with it. It had to be seen by the students as an integral part of the course. To achieve this, the LMS must be given a position of prominence by all stakeholders. Even by the date of the survey it appeared that at some of the partner institutions, students were unaware that blended learning had been implemented in Newgarth University's Business School and as a consequence, also at the partner institutions.

Having received little or no explanation about blended learning's use, operation and purpose from academics at Newgarth University, some students, managers and lecturers at the partner institutions appeared to be at a loss as to the reason for, or benefit of, its introduction. This situation led to confusion at the partner institutions on the part of students, managers and lecturers alike. Further confusion was added to some extent by a small but vocal and powerful factional allegiance among

the student body. This group was said to be looking to make political capital where any perceived disadvantage to international students arose.

To the staff and students at the partner institutions, the use of the LMS based at Newgarth University was generally seen as an unnecessary intrusion. The local intranets provided to students by the respective partners had most things, including the teaching materials provided by Newgarth University that were required by the students for study at their respective locations. The addition of the LMS, therefore, created an unnecessary duplication in the minds of the staff and students at the partner institutions. The introduction of the LMS was also viewed by some of the administration at the partner institutions as an attempt by Newgarth University to exert control over them by further reducing any autonomy the partner institution enjoyed.

*"What does this mean for me personally?"* To date the initial results of my research seemed very disappointing. It appeared I had reached yet another dead end. Due to the non-participation of some partner institutions in the initial survey, (or at least the loss of the responses), I strongly suspected their perceptions of intrusion from Newgarth to be the root cause. To many of the students who studied at the partner institutions, it seemed that the idea of the use of the online test was not in itself a problem. It was the instability and inaccessibility of the LMS which severely contributed to the online tests lack of acceptance in many cases. Some of the students regarded the instability as a palming off of an inferior product onto the already-abused international student population. Most of the students surveyed simply put the use of the LMS in the too hard basket. The students had calculated the time and effort they would need to spend in order to learn a new system. They had calculated that their time was best served focusing on other assessments. The students who had attempted the online assessment task – only to discover that the questions were randomised – felt that they had been cheated, by the actual test itself, not by the idea of an online test. There was no restriction in the rules of the assessment about individual work; therefore, they believed they should be able to work collaboratively. For me there needed to be greater reflexivity on all that had occurred to date.

From the qualitative study, it appeared that many of the international students who were surveyed and who took part in focus groups for this study had arrived in Australia with an assumption that they would be taught in a similar academic culture to the one they had been used to. The students were quite assertive in their demands. Collectively, they were a strong body who could and did protest. Australian academic staff appeared to capitulate to their demands when claims of racism were raised by the students. The attempted implementation of the LMS encountered the same racism claims from a small proportion of the students. The majority of students, as a collective, simply ignored the LMS, and the online assignment for which they had to use the LMS, from their studies as it did not fit within their assumptions and expected academic culture.

The results of the research reported so far indicate that it was the students who were resisting the use of the LMS and thus the application of blended learning at the partner institutions. However, these results hid the underlying reality that the students were being encouraged to resist the use of the LMS, possibly albeit unintentionally, by people who were unaware of the benefits of blended learning or who had competing interests.

In the following chapter, I explain how I discovered or realised that the students had formed into allegiance groups. It was these groups that were being dominated by the various hegemonies at play.

# *Chapter 7*

# *Discussion of the Research*

## 7.1 Introduction

The method of data analysis chosen was inductive analysis - a method commonly utilised by ethnographers. Humphreys and Watson (2009) argue that the purpose of such a study "is not to 'do' an ethnography of the organization but to set the analysis of the [subjects] within the 'cultural whole' of the business in question" (Humphreys & Watson, 2009, p. 41). To apply this structure to my study, I have attempted to set the analysis of the students' actions within the "cultural whole" of Newgarth University's partner institutions from 2007 to 2010.

The task that now remains is for me to demonstrate that four main areas of contention were noted in that data, which could create a situation whereby a cohort of students would resist submitting an assignment. These areas of contention are racism, academic imperialism, poor management, and good old-fashioned profit. These four competing anti-interest elements created a situation of Bourdieusian symbolic violence controlling the student environment, the students were simply faced with two options: accept the situation or reject it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Ebadi & Zamani, 2018; Ergin et al., 2018; Everett, 2002; Gast, 2018; Johnson et al., 2008; McGillicuddy & Devine, 2018; Pintin-Perez et al., 2018; Samuel, 2013).

The dynamics of the different student groups under study, meant that each of the different groups appeared to react randomly. In reality, once the situation was analysed and placed in a proper perspective, it could be demonstrated that the students reacted in a perfectly predictable and normal manner. This is illustrated by overlaying Bourdieu's theory of fields on to the situation of the student cohort (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). When there was a perception of a threatening situation, the students would create allegiances within the fields to protect their interests. These fields would be controlled by the dominant hegemony of the group. When the interests of the population of the field were threatened, they would react. The students at Partner A did not feel threatened due to the high pastoral care they already received. The students at Partner B capitulated and preserved the balance to their advantage. The vocal and militant students at Partners C and D made use of the fracture within the competing fields and used political means to resist the symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Croft-Piggin, 2015; Rawolle, 2005). This section covers the period from the beginning of 2010 to the end of 2011.

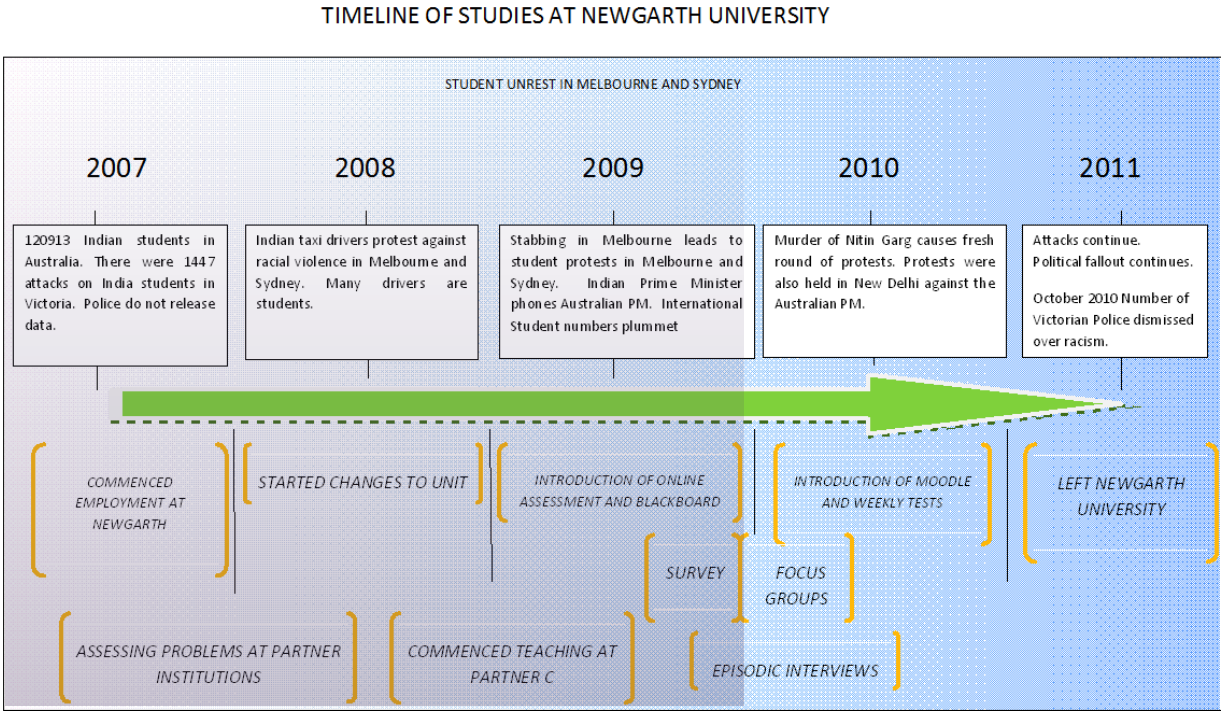



*Figure 28.* This section covers the period from the beginning of 2010 to the end of 2011

## 7.2 Overview

An observation I made over the seven years of this study was that students would form allegiances in groups to further their individual subjective goals. Some would achieve this by forming groups either to study in or to protect their interests. This seems a rather obvious and pedestrian statement. I remember that I only survived my own undergraduate legal study due to a dedicated group of friends, who formed a study group which survived four years of study and beyond. In New Zealand, undergraduate law was a brutal competitive system, where each student had to compete against everyone else for an ever-decreasing number of seats available in the following academic year. It started with over 800 applicants for law school; fewer than 60 graduated. The entire study group managed to survive. At first-year interviews, students were told that the process was deliberately designed to: (a) limit the number of law graduates to a sustainable number that the profession could support; (b) ensure that only those with sufficient drive, focus and aptitude would endure; and I now suspect that a third reason (c) was to deter the formation of study and support groups that would not represent the true competitive nature of the legal profession.

However, when looking back at the interviews and focus groups that were conducted for this study, the thread of these discussions pointed to the formation of allegiances and groups. If the results of the first survey are analysed, the managers' meetings and the observations of the actions of the students in the different institutions, in light of group formation, a very interesting pattern is presented. This is vastly different from what I had originally set out to demonstrate. I had previously set out to show that a collective of international students studying at the partner institutions of Newgarth University en masse refused to undertake an online assessment. However, this was incorrect. There is more than enough evidence to support the contention that the students did, in fact, undertake the assessment but failed to submit it. Furthermore, not all students in the cohort

under examination failed to submit. The students from two partner institutions submitted almost in their entirety as did the students at the home campus.

My curiosity was sparked as to why groups of students – in one case separated only by a city block – would act so differently. From my very first examination of the literature relating to the students failing to submit the online assessment, I had determined that this was a very unusual event. For the sake of brevity, I will refer to the failure to submit as the "anomaly." I had also determined from the literature that it was eminently possible that the root of the problem was the personal characteristics of the students (Akkoyyunlu & Yilmaz-Soylu, 2008). This was not a cultural or racial issue, but one of pure economics and learning styles.

It appeared to me at the beginning that the very reasons and characteristics that had led to these students wanting to undertake higher education in Australia were the very same that would lead them to participate in the anomaly. I suspected that in line with Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz-Soylu's (2008) research in Turkey, the students who had been recruited from the Nepal/India/south Asia region had a disposition to the Diverger learning style. As previously set out, the Diverger style of learning is to use concrete experiences and active experimentation. The student sees, feels and touches things in a very kinetic way rather than seeing in the abstract. The Diverger learner then re-creates by experimentation. Students in this group tend to be social and work collectively, which facilitates the experience and experimentation.

The Diverger students have a disposition to avoiding the individual style of learning required for the online environment, where minimal support is/was available and personal interaction limited. I have said "was," as the use of the internet for personal communication had massively increased in the intervening years between the discovery of the anomaly and that of present day. In very recent years and in many facets of life such as business, education and social networking the internet has become the normal way of communication. Today in 2019 some 10 years after my first examination of the plight of the students at Newgarth's partner institutions, even the international students from the lower-socioeconomic areas communicate extensively on the internet. This was unfortunately seen in the recent Melbourne unrest, where two gangs of immigrant youths organised a very public brawl via social media on the internet.

I had originally suspected back in 2007–08 that the overseas recruitment process had, in the main, targeted students from lower- socioeconomic backgrounds who wanted to gain permanent residency in Australia in order to escape the oppressions in their country of origin. The background of many of these students suggested a generic social upbringing where collective activity was the dominant hegemony. This would be true both in the densely populated cities of India through to the remote towns and villages of Nepal. The research I had conducted in the form of the survey and the interviews had been geared towards this theory. I had asked questions which would direct me to the socioeconomic background of the students and how it related to education and electronic learning.

My plan was to demonstrate a structure created by the Newgarth model of partner institutions and overlay on top of that structure Bourdieu's socio-political theory of habitus and fields. The intention was to demonstrate that the students had developed in a cultural environment or "field", where the rule of collaboration was not only desirable for survival but was also imperative. To take the students from this field and place them into one where the dominant rule was for individual achievement and recognition, required from the students a reaction of compliance or resistance to the new regime. This discussion of the results of the research will demonstrate that I was only partly correct. The results of the survey indicate that there was a distinct problem with many of the students' acceptance of the online environment.

In a strict quantitative setting, where the results were reduced to a given numerical value, the level of acceptance was in my survey was well below that which I would have liked but on a par with what was expected. While it was not possible, due to the differences in the instruments, to draw comparisons with the research that used an unadulterated form of the WEBLEI, returns for my survey at 60.4% did not display a great satisfaction with the LMS. The results, however, were not sufficiently clear to determine just where the students' dissatisfaction lay. The original WEBLEI and thus my sketched model, was not geared towards the actual physical online environment but towards the students' perceptions of this environment. I decided that to maintain continuity, I should continue the exploration of the students' perceptions of the online environment and its associated tasks. It became clear, subsequently, that this was a fortuitous move.

In order to develop and obtain useable data, I continued the planned sessions of interviews and included the contingent series of focus groups (contingent in that they would be conducted if too few volunteer participants came forward). I also included in the data my personal observations from meetings with the managers of the partner institutions. The one element that was mentioned in all interviews, focus groups, managers' meetings and my personal observations, and which remained consistent throughout these various methods of data collection, was the students' desire and need to form groups, both for social and collegial support. This observation leaned less towards students being categorised as *Divergers* in Kolb's (1984) learning-style inventories being the cause of the anomaly and more towards Bourdieu's theory of habitus and fields (1983; 1990). Habitus is, according to Bourdieu (1986), the collection of rules and understandings that enables a person to survive in a given environment. I have personally observed this within Australian Aboriginal communities. The rules and understandings required to live in the tropical north by the inhabitants of the Tiwi Islands are vastly different from those of the Warlpiri people that reside a thousand kilometres south in the central desert of Australia. The Tiwi people are sedentary, where their existence revolves around aquatic activities. Conversely, the Warlpiri people are desert dwellers, who were originally nomadic and travelled according to seasonal migrations for food and water. While both races of Aborigines share some aspects of the Dreaming – the set of religious rules, laws and disputes resolution system – they developed very different cultures which enabled them to survive in very different harsh environments. While this may seem far removed from international students in Melbourne and Sydney, the theory is the same. The international students at the centre of this study migrated to Australia complete with their culture and their relevant devices for survival. When the students perceived they were threatened, these survival devices came in to play. They formed, groups, collectives and allegiances.

What I was not prepared for was the observation that the resultant group's hegemony was captured – for want of a better word – and manipulated to a great or lesser extent. This was achieved in two very competing ways. First, by the application of symbolic violence by the institutions against the student cohort (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Everett, 2002; Thomas, 2002) . Secondly, when a fracture occurred in the fields due to (in this situation) the external physical violence, the resulting collective group was further captured politically as a resistance to the symbolic violence (and real violence) by the need for legitimisation and recognition (Croft-Piggin, 2015; Larana, Johnston, & Gusfield, 1994; Samuel, 2013). They gained solidarity in the formation of a collective identity with a joint manifesto (Bourdieu, 2000; Larana et al., 1994; Samuel, 2013). Further reflection on this observation led me to believe that this capturing was in fact a very normal aspect of groups and was, in fact, an incredibly powerful tool that could be utilised in these very educational settings.

So, what were these perceived threats that the students encountered, and what devices were used to counteract them?

## 7.3 The Threats – Racism, Academic Imperialism, Poor Management, and Plain Old-Fashioned Profit

**7.3.1 Racism.** I was quite stunned by the overt racism I witnessed in Australia, I was not alone in this (News-Agencies, 2009). The starkness and overtness of the racism directed at the Newgarth international students in 2007 took me quite by surprise. I was more surprised to find Indian students targeted specifically. As I have described earlier in this study, from the very beginning of my exposure to Newgarth University, I was told that I had an obligation to maintain the *standard of legal education*, and that, quite frankly, the Indian students did not possess the skills or education to pass at Newgarth University's required standard. This was an issue raised by the Victorian Ombudsman though not specifically at international students from India (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011). Although I did not have actual knowledge that this reasoning was relayed directly to the students, I do know that the students were acutely aware that there was covert racial discrimination directed towards them (Arup, 2008; Baird, 2010; Bourdieu, 2000; Dept of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, 2008; Thomas, 2002). The comments from Gitika alone were enough to confirm this, without my own observations, or the comments from both the survey and the focus groups. The inability of the students to pass the law components of their degree was regularly brought up in conversations with them. It was a great source of anguish and disquiet, especially when the failure of the students to pass core units of the degree cost so much financially and so much more in the effect it had on their lives.

The reliance on the so-called required *standard of legal education* was also a point of contention for me. The students in question were not, nor were they ever going to be, law students with an academic goal of becoming practising lawyers. Business and commercial law teachers were simply exposing students to the Australian legal system and its components, so they could identify issues and problems. For those students who were interested in undertaking legal studies, I personally introduced them to some of the excellent law schools in the region.

The requirement of the CPA for the successful completion of the law components was that students had an understanding of specified topics. The CPA's own Fundamentals of Business Law Exam is very basic, giving guidelines to the topics and academic level required (CPA, 2018). It was beyond comprehension that a topic taught in three weeks in a commercial law unit could be expected to give the students the same in-depth learning and understanding that a full semester of that topic at a dedicated law school could give (Thomas, 2002). Yet this full law school understanding was the standard being imposed on the students. Unfortunately, it is my experience that this still goes on today. Of course, students did manage to pass, although in a good number of cases this was through the virtue of open-book exams and enough surface learning to match text book example questions with examination questions and a good deal of exam coaching.

Racism was not confined to the academic standards. The students at some of the partner institutions were treated as second-class citizens. It was my observation that the comparison between the well-appointed facilities of Partner A and those of Partner B, which bordered on degradation, were so vast it is always a source of wonder to me how Partner B was allowed to continue. While this is a narrow observation from a small subject base, it appeared that those institutions operated by predominantly international personnel treated their students with less respect than those institutions that employed mainly domestic Australian staff (whatever domestic Australian staff may be). However,

this was a weak observation as the staff at Newgarth, who displayed the greatest racism, were predominantly domestic and of European descent (see Chapter 1).

The racism that the students experienced was not limited to the education realm and its institutions. There was an intense escalation of racist displays from all sectors of the Australian community, which was not limited to the predominantly Caucasian segments (see Chapter 4.6). Shockingly violent attacks on international students saw them withdraw into defensive groups. I observed from conversation and attending student meetings, that this overt racism, which sparked international concerns and condemnation, coloured how the students saw and reacted to any situation that could be interpreted as a threat (see Figures 20 -27 where the student's plights were reported on the ABC on line, on the BBC, on Aljazeera, in Calcutta, and in the Taipei times.) This included the very educational endeavours that caused them to migrate to Australia in the first place.

**7.3.2 Academic imperialism.** Academic imperialism occurs when one dominant group of academics ignores or fails to recognise or acknowledge an alternative discourse. As Amsler points out, sometimes it is not the political motivations that creates academic imperialism, "but rather the structural and cultural inequalities which shape the kinds of discourse and volume and meaning of intellectual work…"(Amsler, 2007, p. 180) I have tried to choose these words carefully as this is a difficult area to approach. The concept as it applies to this study, I believe, resided in the peripherals of this study as economic based, with it neither being racism nor post-colonialism (Alatas, 2003). Alatas suggested that academic imperialism may take the form of academic/economic dependency via Australian universities' funding for third world institutions. Alatas states "The fifth dimension of academic dependency concerns investment in education. This refers to the direct investment of educational institutions from the West in the Third World. An example would be the various degree programmes offered by North American, British and Australian universities in Asia, sometimes involving joint ventures with local organizations. Without such direct investment, there would be *fewer opportunities for tertiary education and fewer teaching jobs available* in Asian countries." (Alatas, 2003, p. 605) (The emphasis is mine). It is not an inconceivable stretch to see that such dependency by an overseas partner institution to an Australian university, could also be created by the same university to onshore partner institutions. Especially where that onshore partner is wholly dedicated to international students. It is easy to see that without this investment there would be fewer academic jobs available in Australia. Academic jobs are tenuous at best. It was estimated that in 2015 there was up to four times as many casual staff in academia as there are full time staff (Griffith, 2018). For any of those academic readers who have been subjected to the sessional academic work merry-go-round you will understand the arbitrariness of this employment situation where a small misplaced criticism of a coordinator will mean loss of work for the casual academic (Andrews, 2016; Clohesy, 2015; Jericho, 2018; Long, 2018). There are very few work protections under the Australian Fair Work Act for casual academic employees (Australian Parliament, 2009).

In the study, rightly or wrongly, academic imperialism raised its head in the form of a stance taken by some members of the university fraternity to retain academia as a calling or profession rather than have it reduced to the lowly ranks of a service industry, where it would reside alongside other great service providers such as McDonalds and Woolworths and with it the casual zero hours contracts that plague staff (Cassidy & Parsons, 2017; Young & Forsyth, 2017). For the academics at the partner institutions they are often caught between the economic reality of passing students to keep their position verses reaching the academic ideal of perfection. The Victorian Ombudsman commented in 2011, "I consider that the universities need to shift their focus from recruiting students and boosting

their revenue to ensuring their international students have the necessary skills to study successfully" (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011, para 25). Newgarth University, in its far-sighted innovative search for a method to survive a declining and mobile catchment group, created a system whereby the provision of its academic services was outsourced to private providers. The great franchising experiment for Australian education had begun. This successful survival strategy was … is … a double-edged sword. It achieves the gaining of the almighty EFT (equivalent full-time students) by offering financially discounted degrees as a product. As with any product, these degrees are only sellable if there is a market. The main market that Newgarth's degrees were aimed at was those students who wished to meet the Australian Government's criteria for permanent residency in Australia. The conflict was that the students undertaking such courses were not so much interested in the skills of being an accountant but were more concerned to gain points on the permanent residency application form that an accounting degree would provide them. It is, therefore, conflicting to some university staff that the attaining of a recognised academic standard is no longer the stand-alone goal of academic study. In the 2011 report the Victorian ombudsman claimed:

> I consider that the universities need to strengthen their systems. The university staff interviewed during my investigation were committed to giving international students a meaningful education, and to preserving quality and standards in the face of significant changes to their working environment. However, some staff reported experiences that are cause for concern. These include:
>
> • A nursing lecturer at one university said her head of school had given extra marks to students because he thought the failure rate for her subject was too high and he wanted 'to get the traffic lights green.'
>
> • Academics at three universities said the way they assess students has changed, with less emphasis on written examinations and more emphasis on other types of assessment such as group work.
>
> • Academics at three universities said plagiarism is a problem for students. One RMIT academic described it as 'running rampant.'
>
> • Six of fifteen academic staff interviewed from the four universities reported they had been offered a bribe by a student (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011, para 30).

The attaining of some form of academic achievement is no longer evidence of a student's ability to participate in the expansion of a given disciplinary area, but simply a commodity to be traded. Worse still, it is a commodity that displays evidence of attaining a minimum standard to be traded to the federal government for the right to reside in Australia.

In one fell swoop, academia had been reduced from a state of striving for academic excellence to one of providing evidence of minimum standards. It is little wonder that many academics suggest when students graduate from such private institutions and are handed their degree they are asked "Would you like fries with that?", referring, of course, to a McDonalds' form of fast education (Frost 2006). Ironically, McDonalds University (2010) and the Australian Hotel School (2016) are models which may represent the form of business education in the future; though this is not within the ambit of this study.

In the Newgarth situation, I would suggest that academic imperialism was the underpinning rationale for the overt resistance to the adoption of the partner institution model. Many academic staff wanted the university to remain as a regional tertiary institution focused on the provision of services that would enhance rural and regional industry and lifestyles. I truly believe that the overt racism

that occurred at Newgarth was not actually intended as a form of racial prejudice (or even considered one by the perpetrators). It was a mechanism to maintain only those people in the community who had that community's interests at the forefront.

By focusing on international students, Newgarth University redirected it strategic planning from the focus on regional needs to the needs of the university itself in order to survive. This clash of academic interests between the needs of the university and the community it served created conflict, where the consumers of the service provided by the university became pawns in a power struggle. The Victorian Ombudsman reported:

> My investigation has highlighted areas where concerns have been expressed by staff who work with students, often supported by other witnesses and research. Universities rejecting these concerns, in the face of evidence from their own staff, raises concerns about their commitment to their students and their reputations for providing quality teaching (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011, Para. 46).

International students from large, politically diverse countries saw the rather unsophisticated power struggle for what it was and protested against being used in such a manner (Indiatimes, 2009). The result was open protest in the streets (see Chapter 4.6).

**7.3.3 Poor management.** It was evident from my own observation in the very early exposure to Newgarth University that while an innovative strategic plan to raise funds and the profile of Newgarth University had been directed, the implementation and management of that plan sadly lacked the same insight, innovation and management. The *bussing incident* which occurred in 2009 was a good example of such bad management (see Chapter 4.5). The cost of running the coordination and administration of the scheme outstripped the gains made by the financial arrangement between the partners and Newgarth University. One small piece of evidence of this is the lack of foresight in the assessment regimes (see Chapter 4.2). In short, poor management meant that a good idea actually started costing the University money. Poor management also saw non-compliance with AQUA requirements, which facilitated the unfair treatment of Newgarth University's students at the partner institutions, causing them to be treated as something less than their counterparts at the home campus (AUQA, 2009). The lack of knowledge and understanding of the blended-learning requirements which led to this study was just one evidential example (AUQA, 2009; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). The general unrest of a large portion of the university's international student cohort requiring the intervention from state, federal and international governments was also strong evidence that serious mismanagement had occurred (Arup, 2008; AUQA, 2009; Baird, 2010; Dept Of Innovation Industry And Regional Development, 2008; Victorian Auditor-General, 2009).

**7.3.4 Plain old-fashioned profit.** "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" or so the cliché goes (Martin, 2018). In Newgarth University's case, the cliché was particularly appropriate. The innovative strategy of franchising education delivery via the partner institutions was an extraordinary, far-reaching strategy. It had the potential to save the University in a time when there was a projected down turn of regional students and it would provide a means by which the University could continue to service its primary regional commitments. Ironically, a major resistance to this plan came from those very proponents who wanted a greater regional

commitment. Those proponents were just not prepared to compromise as to how this was to be achieved (see Chapter 1) (Golding et al., 2007).

Adding to this irony was the introduction of the private institutions. These institutions are not and never had any pretence of being benevolent societies. Their sole purpose for existence was to make a profit, as is the purpose of most businesses. (In 2009, the international student business was still on the upward boom (see Chapter 4). As of 2018 the International Student industry in Australia is worth $32 billion dollars a year (Universities Australia, 2018)). Their method of achieving this was by creating a business plan whereby they provided economically attractive educational services to consumers. (Following the introduction of the far-reaching Australian Consumer law 2010 (ACL) (Competition and Consumer Act 201 (Cth), tertiary students are classified as consumers. There is no longer a requirement under the ACL for the supplier of goods or services to be a company, thus Australian universities are suppliers to consumers). This is simplistic supply and demand business strategy. To achieve their profit forecasts and attract investment these institutions must be able to compete with the parent university financially by providing services that are more desirable to students (for example travel and fees packages.) It was a strange situation whereby the partners were encouraged to compete in a conflict-of-interest situation with the parent institution. (Hence this is not a partnership arrangement as the legal agency (not Bourdieusian) requirements would prevent this conflict of interest). While it is not possible to determine absolutely, it must be surmised that both the universities and the astute business people running the partner institution companies, in the period between 2008 and 2010, would be aware of the impending changes to the *Trade Practices Act* and its implications for the international student education industry (the Bill was introduced to Parliament in June 2009 after two years of research and drafting (Australia, 2009). It would be standard S.W.O.T. business analysis practice to manoeuvre one's enterprise to take advantage of any possible changes and to protect against any threats that the legislative changes would implement (for example, the removal the travel and fee packages) ( S.W.O.T. is an acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (Queensland Government, 2017).

While each of the partners appeared to recruit students from different regions, there was still direct conflict with those international students that Newgarth itself recruited. If the partners had been able to expand their share of the market, their increased student cohorts (and presumably a decreasing Newgarth home campus cohort) would have given them increased negotiating power including greater autonomy. It was this apparent push for greater power and autonomy that was evident in most of the meetings with the managers of the partner institutions (or lack of meetings as the case may be).

## 7.4 Meetings

It is mentioned in Chapter 3 that the meetings with the partner managers were first to introduce the concept of blended learning and secondly as part of the ethics application process. The meetings with the partner managers provided a good insight into the competing and conflicting-interest struggles which could be seen as impediments to students accepting the online assessment. I identified that Sitara at Partner D in Adelaide appeared focused on her personal key performance indictor (KPI) regarding the quantity of successfully completed EFT (equivalent full time) student units. This focus, which appeared admirable in terms of student welfare, was in the long term detrimental to the students and to all the institutions in general.

The risk of reducing the quality of the teaching and thus lowering the academic standards to suit the lower-quality teaching reflects poorly on the quality of graduating students. These lowered qualities manifest themselves in the workplace, where graduate students are unable to perform the most

basic of tasks within their chosen profession. These graduates become expensive liabilities to prospective employers rather than assets. In a closely monitored profession such as accounting, it does not take long for employers to communicate to each other which institutions have the best graduates, and which do not.

Ironically, this was the very situation that both the Head of the Law division back in 2007, and Gitika, the student activist in 2009, were attempting to prevent, though from diametrically opposed perspectives. The antithesis of this proposition was that from a student perspective, the majority of them were undertaking the courses to gain permanent residency (Jackling, 2007). Australian immigration regulations require only that the degree is successfully completed, not that it is completed to any predetermined standard other than the minimum threshold set by the university.

To the students seeking permanent residency the quality of and depth of learning for the course is secondary to the goal of successful completion (Jackling, 2007). Ideally to the students, this completion is also achieved in the shortest possible time and at the least expense. Sitara would appear to have been attempting to fulfil her KPI by ensuring she met what she had determined were her students' expectations. To achieve this proposed lowering of academic standards, Sitara would have had to have had complete autonomy over the course curriculum or had the complicity of the course coordinator. The move to a centralised online assessment regime made Sitara's goal very difficult. It was then understandable that in Sitara's view the move to the online assessment task was not in the students' best interests. A similar but not identical situation occurred with Sanjeev from Partner B.

Sanjeev did not consent to his students participating in the research. Therefore, a good deal of the information in relation to the operation of Partner B is speculative though derived from deduction. It was known that Sanjeev's students were, at the time, primarily Sri Lankan, thus they were international students from the south Asia region. Assuming that the trend was true for Partner B as it was for the other partner institutions, students predominantly from this region were drawn to study in Australia primarily for the opportunity to apply for permanent residency. It would seem, then, that Sanjeev was faced with either following Sitara's philosophy of working towards the students' wishes for permanent residency or the stance of providing quality education for future needs.

It was known from my own observations and correspondence that Sanjeev rejected the moderation standard that was applied to every other partner institution and negotiated an individual standard with the administration of the university, which by-passed the moderator/unit coordinator (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011). This resulted in students gaining pass marks that had not been previously granted. It was safe to assume that quality of education was not Sanjeev's main motivational force, and that Sanjeev had successfully argued for a lower academic standard for his students (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011). Presumably, Sanjeev's actions and Newgarth's complicity was necessary because the students at Partner B were not attaining the required standard (Victorian Auditor-General, 2009; Victorian Ombudsman, 2011).

This situation was the one that the Head of the Law stream was attempting to prevent back at the start of the 2007 period. However, it would have been speculation to say why they had not been attaining the required standards, though it was not unreasonable to have deduced that Partner B, the newest of the partner institutions, had been experiencing the same initial problems I had encountered at the other partners in 2007. Sanjeev, by distancing his students and himself from the co-ordination and moderation process at Newgarth University, had put in place impediments that prevented his students from accepting the online assessment task (AUQA, 2009; Dept of Innovation

Industry and Regional Development, 2008; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Victorian Auditor-General, 2009; Victorian Ombudsman, 2011).

By comparison with Partner B, there was, from my observations, never a risk of reducing the academic level of teaching or standards at Partner A. It was not an option that Rose would have considered. The welfare and betterment of her students had always been paramount. The distancing occurred at Partner A through two very different avenues. The first of these was by the students themselves. This occurred as a result of the social media networks that the students had subscribed to. For the Chinese students, there was a state of flux in 2009 as the major social networks were shut down in China on July 2009, the 20th anniversary of Tian'anmen Square (Fischer-Schreober, 2012). For the Indian, Nepalese and Sri Lankan students in the main they used Orkut, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr. I had mentioned these networks in the focus group discussions. On these platforms, especially Orkut, the students created large and powerful chat groups that could provide excellent and almost instantaneous communication. This organisation was evident in the "bussing incident" at Newgarth University, and in the strange situation where, in an invigilated examination where no electronic equipment was allowed, a student complained that she had received a different exam paper to the one the students were sitting contemporaneously in Sydney.

In the context of this study where students were resisting using online applications, it seemed a strange conflict that there were such powerful groups who were connected by and communicated in the very medium they were resisting. The composition of these online groups seemed to have a natural tendency to be of students who knew each other socially or had loose social connections. Thus, the groups seemed to have a cultural base. This was from a natural inclination to include people known to each other who had the same language group and interests. It was not for exclusion reasons. This being the case, the markedly different make-up of the student cohort at Partner A meant there was little cross-communication with the students at the other Newgarth partner institutions. This had the unintentional effect of isolating this group from the other institutions where the predominantly Indian, Nepalese and Sri Lankan students tended to socialise together.

The second factor that led to the distancing of Partner A students was that the primary drive of these students was to attain an Australian degree for work purposes. To the Partner A students, the degree was a goal in itself; it was not merely an element required by the Australian government for permanent residency. Thus, the perspective and attitude of the students was very different from those at the other five partner institutions. The Partner A students had very little they needed or wanted to complain about.

Rose at Partner A had isolated her students and used this to her advantage. This was possibly due to the situation that Partner A had already been an established international student provider in the hospitality arena and had only expanded into the higher education arena as a secondary revenue source. Rose, then, had different expectations to the other partner institutions and had much greater experience to draw upon. Rose was working from a very secure financial footing, with no need to define her territory or compete in the market. By comparison to the sure-footedness of Rose, there was almost diametrical opposition between the stances of Doreen at Partner C in Sydney and those of Priya at Partner D in Sydney and Jane at Partner C in Melbourne.

Jane at Partner C Melbourne had always been an advocate for the students and was a great supporter of anything that would advance the situation of her students. She was very experienced as an academic coordinator at this type of institution and had slotted into the partner institution franchise extremely well. Jane was very aware of the work I had done in relation to improving the lot of the students and was not only prepared to support me but also guide me on that path. Jane seemed to adopt the role of being my mentor for these changes to the units and to the rollout of

blended learning. Jane did ask for updates and to be kept in the loop on changes. It appeared that these discussions were to ensure that Jane was fully informed of any changes and implementations and to provide advice should there be conflicts with such things as ESOS Act requirements, Blackboard access, or assessments in other units. Her only motivation appeared to be that happy students made for a happier, less stressful life.

Jane, who no longer works for Partner C, informed me in 2016 that she, too, was now using the experience as a basis for her own doctoral thesis. Priya at Partner D in Sydney, although working for a competitor of Jane's, acted like a work colleague. Priya had, like Jane, always been supportive of any move that would create benefits for the students and had also seen the benefits that had been derived from my previous efforts. She requested only that she be copied in on discussions with Jane and thus be also kept in the loop. Jane was also quite happy with this arrangement. Jane and Priya's attitudes were in contrast to Doreen at Partner C in Sydney.

Doreen at Partner C in Sydney was very pleasant to the point of being condescending. I have mentioned earlier that that there appeared to be a correlation between Sanjeev and Sitara, who were attempting to achieve the same outcome, that of gaining autonomy, by employing different methods; Doreen, too, appeared to be pushing for autonomy. To achieve this, she seemed to be gaining support from the students, as did Gitika, by distancing Partner C from Newgarth. Unlike Rose, Doreen created and fostered an atmosphere of suspicion and disregard for Newgarth. To her students, Doreen was the university. They questioned why should these people that they never see, from some other state hundreds of kilometres away, be controlling them.

It was evident from the conversations with Doreen that this situation had been fostered to create the best form of advertising – that of word of mouth – along the international student grapevine. Doreen had to her credit created the best pastoral care systems for her students I had experienced at any private institution. She used this to her great advantage to ensure the students were fiercely loyal to her. As a result, Doreen was able to suggest to them that outsiders from Newgarth were not there for the best interests of the students. They were there only to cause problems. In Doreen's eyes, any form of centralisation of assessment was seen as a threat to the work she had achieved and method by which she achieved it. Doreen was able to convince her students of this. To Doreen her power, like Sanjeev and Sitara, rested in the push to autonomy and the empire she wished to establish.

When, as it happened in the very near future, Partner C would be able to offer degrees in their own right, in direct competition to Newgarth, Doreen would be much better situated in the market place if she already had autonomy in assessment and administration established. Doreen realised that it was possible that my survey could, as it was supposed to, reveal problematic areas in the current system and point to ways that the system could be rectified and improved. Similar to Sanjeev and Sitara's situation, this would not have been in Doreen's best interests.

While no hard proof ever surfaced that there was anything untoward that prevented the Sydney survey sheets from being returned to me, on the balance of probabilities the possibility existed. I know from the focus group discussion that the students at Partner C undertook the survey. I know that Doreen's PA had sent an email to say that the completed survey forms had been dispatched in the prepaid courier envelope I had provided; yet the courier had no record of it being collected or of a notification to collect the envelope. The system for moving documents in the partner institutions had been ironclad – tried, tested and true. Hundreds of assessment and exam moderation samples had passed backwards and forwards with great regularity and had never been mislaid. Yet this one envelope containing the returned survey forms had mysteriously disappeared between Doreen's office and reception.

The question I asked, but never received an explanation for, was why the survey returns had gone to the manager's office in the first place. They had not been sent to her, but, once Doreen had given permission, they were sent to the law course's coordinator, who agreed to disseminate and return them. The loss of the survey forms from Sydney had been inconvenient for me, though in hindsight it had been a serendipitous incident. Had I received the forms from Sydney, the survey results would have been vastly different, and I would probably have never investigated further.

As matters stood, from my observations and analysis of the meetings over the past seven years, I had come to the conclusion that the partner institution system itself, and the conflicting agendas of the people involved that the system had created, had culminated in the development of the four main areas of contention that had created a situation whereby a cohort of students could resist submitting an assignment. There was symbolic violence perpetrated by Newgarth to the students at the partner institutions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). There was academic imperialism perpetrated by Newgarth University towards staff at the partner institution (Alatas, 2003; Amsler, 2007). There was mismanagement of the partner institution system (Victorian Auditor-General, 2009; Victorian Ombudsman, 2011). Finally there was the situation where profit was put before the pastoral care of the students (Victorian Auditor-General, 2009; Victorian Ombudsman, 2011).

This was an interesting scenario that had emerged, and it did answer the original focus questions. However, this observation of the underpinning reasons for the anomaly did not explain the actions of the students in resisting the assessment or the methods employed in that resistance. Equally, the apparent differing reactions from students studying at three different institutions within a city block remained something of an unexplained enigma. For this analysis, it was necessary to go back to the information supplied by students themselves to determine their actions.

## 7.5 Survey

The research for this thesis changed direction after the data was collected. It became evident upon reflection that the participants and actors/agents did not act in isolation but in groups, and in relation to other groups. Further analysis of the data no longer targets the individual student; instead, it was now focused on the actions of the student groups and their interaction with other groups. Due to this change in direction, the logistical process of designing, gaining permission and conducting the survey possibly gave more useable data that the actual survey itself. As previously mentioned, the survey and its contents had been originally designed prior to the commencement of the study proper. They had been directed towards a specific theory – that of Akkoyunlu's derivation of Kolb's learning-style inventories, and an unintentional collective of Diverger learners (Akkoyunlu & Yilmaz-Soylu, 2008).

As with the interviews, the survey had been directed towards the students' educational background and environment. The survey had been loosely sketched on the WEBLEI structure with the original intention of displaying both the students' perceptions of Newgarth online environment and how this compared to others who used the WEBLEI. Although the WEBLEI was the inspiration for my survey, the final version of the survey, due to what I saw as the short comings of the WEBLEI, was so far removed from the original instrument that comparisons could not be made. The results were therefore stand alone and compared over the two teaching periods. The original analysis of the results (focusing on the problem being with the students) now needed to be re-evaluated in light of the new context that the underpinning reason for the resistance was the *system* itself. This creates the situation whereby the results of the survey become an element – or evidence – for the analysis rather than the subject of it. If the individual students are now seen as agents entering a new field, the student's background or habitus will dictate how they react to the pressures exerted by the

forces within and intersecting the field. If the student cannot recognise and react to these pressures, they will withdraw. They will be the *fish out of water* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Thomas, 2002). This withdrawal "is an act of complicity, of symbolic violence" (Everett & Jamal, 2004, p. 66) The remaining students take up their position in the fields with the purposes of "either preserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces…" (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 29).

In the previous section, the discussion of the meetings that had transpired between the partner managers and I, makes it eminently clear that not every manager, for a variety of reasons, had been comfortable with the idea of introducing an online assessment. There had been a great deal of diplomatic manoeuvring from the managers of the partner institutions. Some had been very overt in their opposition as in the situation of Partner B; others had been subtler, as in the situation in Partner C in Sydney where I came to realise that I was being patronised and sidelined. From my observations, it is my opinion that Doreen never intended to risk relinquishing even a modicum of power. I had always been aware of these power struggles, and it had been in this context that the survey had been conceived. (Though I admit to being completely ignorant as to the real extent of this power struggle). The economic capital held by the partner managers is used as power within the field. The power is a transformative power used to create a probable future within the field, based upon what the dominant agent sees as possible (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu, 1995). Sanjeev by by-passing lower order employees, refused to accept the norms of the field and used his capital as power to effect transformation (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu, 1995). Doreen uses her capital (the support of her students) to do the same thing. Sitara was not successful in her attempt at transformation as her capital was rapidly depleting. Rose, Jane and Priya all also have power within the field, however their aim is to preserve the structure and balance of the forces within the field (Bourdieu, 1995).

I knew that to have gained any headway in the implementation of blended learning, I would have had to have first proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that there had been an actual problem. Exactly what the problem was could have been defined later, but initially, a quantifiable fact supported by hard evidence was required to demonstrate that students had declined, for whatever reason, to submit the online assessment task. This evidence was required as I was attempting to legitimise the introduction of new pedagogical practices. As Thomas (2002) has explained, pedagogy in this situation is seen as reinforcing the status of the institution and setting what the dominant culture sees as legitimate. The introduction of Bended learning strengthens the dominant culture thereby threatening the transformative powers of the other actors.

At first blush, the survey achieved its objective by establishing quantifiably that a problem existed. Even the attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the research were not successful. While it is accepted that the scores between my survey, those of Chang and Fisher (2006) and those of Skelton (2009), cannot be taken as a direct comparison due to the not insignificant changes in the different instruments; they can be used as indicia. However, as in Skelton's (2009) study, my survey appeared to establish little else. This was due to the individual nature of the survey, which was anonymous and had been given to each student, who, in turn, was then expected to submit it individually. After the focus groups had been conducted, it had become apparent that the survey could not be seen in individual terms but was required to be evaluated in terms of the blocks of students or the allegiances. Each group of student were attempting to gain power within the field by gaining recognition as having a genuine collective identity (Samuel, 2013). For example, the block of ten try-hards who claimed racism (pseudo-anti-racism activist), Gitika's followers (Anti-violence), and those students from Partner A (Chinese students post Tian'anmen Square). There were even the blocks of students from Partner B, who were not permitted to take the survey (complicit in symbolic violence),

and the block from Partner C whose responses were invalidated for them (politically misled). The individual interviews also now needed to be analysed in terms of the blocks of students.

## 7.6 Interviews and Focus Groups

As stories from colleagues and contemporary students have confirmed, the progression of a doctoral study does not always follow a simple path along a line of least resistance. This study was no exception. Over the seven-year period of this part-time study, supervisors came and went as a fact of natural attrition. With each new supervisor, a new slant or requirement was superimposed upon the original study. Combined with this was the realisation that the anticipated conclusion was not correct, and that a different one that had not previously been considered began to emerge through the course of the investigation, the reader can understand the feeling of dismay that was permeating through the remaining research. It was only when a different constant thread emerged, which seemed unrelated to that original purpose and intention of the data collection, that the mist seemed to lift.

It was due to the emerging of this thread that that the collected data from the focus group interviews, the individual interviews and my own observations had to be analysed in light of that thread. If the cohorts of students at the centre of this study are examined over the entire 2009 academic year, it can be seen that eighteen distinct groups of students were established. These were the cohorts at each of the partners institutions over the two teaching periods. It became clear that only four of these groups had resisted the online assessment over the full year. This perspective threw an entirely new light on the research to date and required a re-evaluation of the data collected. It was evident that the original supposition that Newgarth had created the issue by marketing to and recruiting from specific geographical regions was not correct.

Although they were initially a contingency strategy, the focus groups became one of the most positive sources of information. It was through these groups that links between the different, and apparently conflicting, sources of data were able to be made. The focus groups demonstrated that the Sydney and Melbourne students at Partners C and D were not isolated. They worked together, though each had location-specific issues. The replies from the groups indicated that the four very different cohorts (two in each teaching period) had very different experiences and, consequently, had very different expectations and demands.

The focus groups demonstrated that while there were internal social division within the cohorts, such as between the groups that classified themselves as girls and the women, the students generally considered themselves a group. The students continually spoke in the collective and operated as a unit. Gitika had spoken of the students undertaking the failed assessment as being in the collective and working together. Even when the Melbourne girls that approached me, had spoken of their experience with the business people of their community, they were still talking in terms of groups. Gitika did not say that “she sorted *him* out”; she said: “we talked to *them*.”

When this refocusing of the individual student into groups is translated to an analysis of the four individual interviews, an underlying point becomes clear. All four participants focus on groups and their formation. Vanessa experienced racial segregation from the majority of Indian students. She identified that these students seemed to work as a group, as a collective. There were very many strong leaders in the group, with the majority of students being led by these more dominant figures. Vanessa, while displaying borderline racist tendencies herself in response to this dominant group, saw this as an excuse to use the situation to her own advantage. She had no qualms about taking on the hegemony of the dominant group and treating others as she saw the way they were treating her.

Vanessa became interested in which of the leading figures could attract the best students to a study group and then determined how she could join the group that would be of the most value to her. To Vanessa, Partner C was simply a means to an end, so she could fulfil her father's requirements, then return to Perth to her preferred group of friends and study the topic she really wanted to. In Bourdieusian terms, Vanessa was utilising her cultural capital to work within the field preserving the structure and balance to her own goals (Thomas, 2002).

Domani had mentioned that, like Vanessa, "she regarded the large proportion of Indian students as a close-knit community who tended to exclude students of other nationalities." Domani was legally trained in a competitive system and was thus used to working in that strange symbiotic competitive/complementary environment of the legal profession. Domani found that she also, like Vanessa, was able to pick and choose her study group partners if she wished. For Domani, the culture shift that was most dramatic for her was to adapt to the cosmopolitan Melbourne lifestyle. Once she had adjusted to this, her legal training enabled her to manage study groups to her advantage. Very much like Vanessa, Domani saw Partner C as a means to an end. In her case, it was permanent residency. If the community of Indian students at Partner C wanted to play power games, she was quite happy to play the game and win (Hawkes, 2014).

Victor also spoke of the need for study groups. To Victor, it was not, however, a matter of joining a group. Victor was a leader. It was only natural to him that the groups would be his, and he invited those to join that were of value to him. Unlike Vanessa and Domani, Victor had not experienced racial or cultural barriers in gaining entry to such study groups; in fact, it was quite the opposite. Victor was a good-looking, very amenable, well-spoken, intelligent, young man. He had plans and the smooth-talking manner of a confident corporate salesperson that would take him a long way. Victor was very much the social being. He needed the entourage and the quasi-authority that he gained from leading those that followed him. Just like Vanessa and Domani, Victor was quite prepared to use those around him for his own ends (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Sofie was just a little different.

Sofie, in comparison to the other interviewees, had come with a different agenda. Sophie was a very intelligent girl with everything going for her. In her early 20s, she already had a master's degree in management and an impressive resumé. Sofie's husband had an executive position with a large bank in Melbourne. This position came with certain benefits that included permanent residency for both of them, impressive accommodation and a sufficient salary for a young couple to enjoy themselves. To external appearances, Sofie could be termed as the contemporary "it girl."[20] During her interview Sofie explained that she was just a little homesick and undertaking the degree was little more than an excuse to be around young Indian people. Sofie was doing what was natural to her, using education and taking the degree while she filled in time deciding what to do in Australia. She always had an entourage following her and from an outward appearance perspective, she was not dissimilar to either Victor or Gitika. The difference was, however, that to Sofie it was all about fun, more of a hedonistic fulfilment than a need for academic enlightenment or personal growth. In class, her studies were not the primary focus, so she was actually quite disruptive. Fortunately for her, she was so intelligent that despite the distractions, she was performing at the top of the class, unlike most of her entourage. Bourdieu makes a comparison with the use of economic and cultural capital with

[20] Urban dictionary http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=it%20girl. The "it girl" is the girl that everyone wants to be. She has everything that you want, so you tend to envy her. She does all the things that you can't do so you grow to hate her. Being an it girl is having the latest shits, (the best clothing and always stays fly) and the prettiest face. Her attitude can be fucked up or perfect like her looks. Her presence is always appreciated, all the guys want her, and all the girls want to be her!
http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=it%20girl.

playing a game of roulette. For Sofie, her habitus of growing up in a military family where education and discipline were normal and complimentary, gave her the cultural capital to be able to play Bourdieu's game of roulette to perfection (Bourdieu, 1993c) . Bourdieu suggests that even if a person has money their background may deter them from using it to its greatest potential (Bourdieu, 1993c). Bourdieu wrote that

> those with lots of red tokens and a few yellow tokens, that is lots of economic capital and a little cultural capital will not play in the same way as those who have many yellow tokens and a few red ones.... the more yellow tokens (cultural capital) they have, the more they will stake on the yellow squares (the educational system) (Bourdieu, 1993c, p. 34).

For Sofie, her habitus gave her an abundance of red tokens and an equal number of yellow tokens to be able to play Bourdieu's game of roulette to perfection. Within the field, Sofie was the personification of the dominant education culture. Not only was she complicit and preservative of the values, she was the ideal to aspire to.

It was Bourdieu who stated that "the question with which all sociology ought to begin is that of the existence…and mode of existence of collectives" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 250). It should therefore not be surprising to observe that the collection of entourages or groups amongst the students, though formed for very different reasons, all pointed to the common goals of allegiances and common identities (Bourdieu, 2000; Samuel, 2013). The students allied themselves with others that had similar needs, interests, agendas, and/or manifestos which they calculated to benefit them. Although this specific observation was only undertaken at Partner C in Melbourne where the interviews were conducted, it was clear that in this institution the students aligned themselves behind those they saw as leaders (Bourdieu, 2000; Samuel, 2013). Those leaders were students who could offer their followers some form of "good" in the context of the wider community in which they existed (Samuel, 2013). The discussions in the focus groups provided evidence that similar groups existed at the Sydney institutions. In the situation of Partner B in Melbourne, the one group that was able to be observed was that of the entire cohort which followed Sanjeev (the manager) who provided them the good of academic passes outside of the moderation system.

This following of the Partner B students behind Sanjeev, and the fierce rallying of the students behind Doreen at Partner C in Sydney – against Newgarth University – also demonstrated that the formation of the groups was not limited to the student leaders. The groups could be formed even by implication if the followers were able to derive some good. The good the followers received was that which was subjectively important to the individual followers at the time; such things as camaraderie, academic benefits, protection, assertiveness of beliefs, or even hedonistic indulgence. The extrapolation of this is that in each of the institutions under study, the students formed groups and allegiances to some greater or lesser degree when such groupings could provide an individual good to them at the given time.

Why, then, did the introduction of the original online assessment create what appeared to be such a large variation of reactions ranging from total acceptance to open protest in the streets? My personal hypothesis is that the answer to that question could be found in the application of Bourdieu's theory of *fields* and *habitus* to this scenario.

## 7.7 Application to the Theory of Fields

Bourdieu's socio-political theory contends that as people grow in a given societal situation, they gain those skills that are deemed necessary to survive in that given situation. This can be taken as accepted. It is open to anyone to observe, and very evident from my own experiences of living and

working in Australia that the skills required to survive in the wilds of the tropical far northern reaches of Australia's Arnhem Land are very different to those that are required to survive on the streets of Melbourne and Sydney.

The skills, knowledge and abilities that are acquired to survive in the societal context are known as habitus (Bourdieu, 1993c). Over time, these attributes may evolve into a sophisticated system of rules and taboos that meld into customs and beliefs. The examples given earlier of the divergence of Australian Aboriginal societies from those who live in the central desert to those dwellers on the tropical islands is a chasm which is almost insurmountable, yet both of these Aboriginal nations share much of the same traditional laws and belief in magic in the form of the Dreaming (Muswellbrook Shire Council, 2017). The Dreaming is a combination of history, law, religion, politics and, even, roadmaps that provide the skilled user with the knowledge to survive in one of the harshest environments on earth.

The Dreaming is just one example of habitus in action. Bourdieu goes further than identifying habitus; he applies habitus to a series of different situations or contexts, which he calls fields. Where there is some confusion and hesitation in the acceptance of Bourdieu's theories is from the introduction of the term *agency*. I have had many discussions with academics on this topic. "Habitus only works in agency" is the usual retort. When pressed, these same people refer to agency in the legal term – that is, one person acting as an agent for another; a catalyst that effects a change without changing themselves.

This is not how I understand Bourdieu's concept of agency. To Bourdieu, I understand that an agent has complete autonomy and free will, although they are confined within boundaries – for example, as a free agent in the bloodstream, or a soccer player on the playing field. It is the same in Australia, a person is free to do anything they wish as long as it is not unlawful. The action may still be immoral, but immorality is subjective and up to the individual. Thus, it is the situational context which causes the agent to react in either a cognitive or precognitive manner. It is not the agent which effects the action. How the agent will react is to some extent preconditioned by their habitus, their survival skills. However, human beings are adaptive learning beings and therefore will perceive new, previously unknown threats and develop strategies to deal with them accordingly.

Human beings are not the agent for the environment. The environment *acts upon* the agent who reacts. Bourdieu's infamous example of the game of roulette is evidence of this (Bourdieu, 1993c). Roulette is a game of chance that anyone playing it, or not as the case may be, has chosen to do so by their own free will. The players are the agents of the game; it is not possible to play without them. The agents are restricted by the rules of the game and must play within these confines. How they will play is to some greater or lesser extent governed by their individual habitus. Those with a great deal of money will often bet big as it will not be a great loss to them if they lose; but if they win, they win handsomely. Those with very little money, if they play at all, will usually bet small as a minor loss is more easily recovered; however, they will never achieve a big win. Previously it was demonstrated that those with large economic capital (red tokens) but less cultural capital (yellow tokens) may still bet small as they have not learned to use the advantage of the game.

If someone changes the rules of the game or does not play by the rules, then the agents will react. They will retreat from the game or protest. One situation, just such as this, occurred with the students at the centre of this study. If the context of the roulette game is applied to the experience of the international students, the field in which the Australian game is played is controlled by the owner of the game and played somewhat differently to the field which the players are familiar with. The players must capitulate to the new rules or experience what Bourdieu calls *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Everett, 2002). Their habitus has not prepared them for this. They

must conform but find they are losing at this new game. As was detailed in Chapter 2, Thomas (2002, p. 431) explains:

> …educational institutions are able to determine what values, language and knowledge are regarded as legitimate, and therefore ascribe success and award qualifications on this basis. Consequently, pedagogy is not an instrument of teaching, so much as of socialization and reinforcing status. This process ensures that the values of the dominant class has perpetuated and individuals who are inculcated in the dominant culture are the most likely to succeed, while other students are penalised.

While a given habitus will work perfectly well in one contextual field setting, its suitability in a different field with different parameters may be questioned. In the students' situation, they had not been experiencing what their habitus had conditioned them to expect, and so they protested politically. In this situation it is clear to see that habitus *does affect a cohort of students' perceptions of electronic management systems if symbolic violence is used against them.*

The complicated question then before us are the research questions.

**What went wrong?**

The reality is four groups of students, from a total of eighteen, simply gave up on a new version of an online test as it was too much hard work for too little reward (not including students at partner B who were prevented from attempting the test). The students were encouraged to not submit the test to support political agendas from competing groups within the Australian education field. These groups included the emerging political pressure from the Indian students' association (Gitika) and equal pressure from some of the partner institutions who saw the test as a threat (Partners B and C in Sydney). The pressure from the Ombudsman's office saw the dominant hegemony of the field threatened, as appeals against sanctions would be overturned (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011). Newgarth would not pursue cases that had been appealed to the Ombudsman's office from partner institution students on hardship grounds, regardless of breaches of the University's statutes (Victorian Ombudsman, 2011). The resistance to the test was symptomatic of a greater systemic issue as the students were aware that failure to comply would not attract penalties. The power that the parent University now held within the field was no longer the dominant power, but one that was striving to preserve the structure and balance of the forces within the field against competing transformative powers (Bourdieu, 1995). A comparison with the online test conducted in Teaching Period 2, (post 2009 student protests) displays no such problems. It was established by the survey that there was little variance of the student's perception of the learning management system between the two teaching periods. It was also seen that the online test in Teaching Period 2, did not attract any of the resistance seen in teaching period one. With the challenges to the dominant power within the education field stabilised by political intervention, the need to resist introduction of blended learning and online assessment, by both the partner institutions and the students, were removed.

**How can we understand what happened here?**

It is an observed reality that students were and are utilising the Australian education system to gain permanent residency in Australia. In 2018, at one of the institutions I now teach, I had an entire class of 27 taxi drivers, all learning taxation law; a core subject required for completion of the degree. It is something of a source of amusement amongst the other teaching staff (all of whom, but one, are Indian nationals) that there are no carparks in the area when my class is on, due to the taxis in the street. These students have no pretences. They calculate what they need to achieve the minimum mark to gain their degree, and thus apply for the converted Permanent Residency. There are

protests that I am too hard teaching and marking, and that the material is too hard. There are bribes, even threats. There are appeals of hardship to my better nature (though apparently being a lawyer I do not have a better nature according to my students. However, attempts to claim hardship by a student who crashed his 2017 Mercedes, while I am still driving my 25-year-old Toyota, gained howls of laughter from the other students in the class; it did result in the students offering to buy a new car for me though! The students calculated that $1,000.00 each for an assured pass was a good investment against the possibility of $4,500 for another semester's fees. The student who had crashed his car claimed he had a brother who could get me a very good deal on a new Mercedes. A statement that was greeted with even more howls of laughter. I graciously declined the offer, pointing out that bribes were actually illegal in Australia). The students at the centre of this study were no different to my taxi drivers. They had arrived in Australia, for the most part as there are always exceptions, to undertake academic study which would lead them to amassing points towards the Federal Governments' immigration policy for permanent residency (See section 4.3.1.; the immigration rules have changed in 2018, however this study is considering the rules that applied to the students in 2009). They had left their respective education systems and entered the field of the Australian education system. When entering this field, they encountered a complex intersection of competing group values (Bourdieu, 1995; Croft-Piggin, 2015; Samuel, 2013). Each of the groups purporting these values were vying for dominancy within the field (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu, 1993c, 1995, 2000; Croft-Piggin, 2015; Samuel, 2013). The main driver of these competing groups within the field was that of economic capital (Alatas, 2003; Amsler, 2007; Ball, 1990; Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu, 1993c; Green et al., 1999; Harker, 1990; Robbins, 1993; Thomas, 2002). This economic capital was displayed in the need for profit for the partner institutions. The overt racism I first encountered was driven by the need to retain profit in the rural sector. The academic imperialism I encountered was driven by desire to reduce International student numbers but fuelled by the need to retain employment within the partner institutions. Finally the poor management of the universities which performance wise could not compete on an equal footing with the profit driven partner institutions they had created, thus, turning the economic salvation dream plan into an economical nightmare (Victorian Auditor-General, 2009; Victorian Ombudsman, 2011).

The government watchdogs were concerned that academic standards at the partner institutions being so profit driven had fallen to unacceptably low standards (AUQA, 2009; Victorian Auditor-General, 2009; Victorian Ombudsman, 2011). They required better pedagogical approaches to the academic standards in the form of blended learning (AUQA, 2009). These pedagogical approaches reinforce the academic standard of the dominant hegemony within the education field (Everett, 2002). In defence of the Newgarth School of Business, it appears from the survey and from the performance of the students in Teaching Period 2, that the learning management system was adequate for this task. The online test should have been viable. However, some of the competing groups within the field saw this introduction of electronic centralisation as a threat to their power by reducing their economic power over the dominant hegemony. These groups sought to neutralise this threat (see section 7.3).

The students for their part were being used as pawns in this power struggle. They were given clear indications that the Australian government would look favourably upon residency in Australia if they achieve academic standards. The students were then subjected to symbolic violence where they could attempt to meet almost unattainable standards or accept the symbolic violence with complicity and withdraw (Everett, 2002).

It was here that the situation became interesting. This treatment of the international students appeared to spill over into the wider community where they were seen as a soft touch (IANS, 2009; Wilson, 2010). Bourdieu had written in *Pascalian Mediations* (2000) a society cannot impose strict

conditions on a class of persons then claim that the class is inferior due to those conditions. It would appear that this is what the international students saw had occurred to them. In 2009, the physical violence was being perpetrated against international students at an alarmingly escalated rate (see section 4.6). Yet there seemed to be no attempt to curb this violence other than to blame the students themselves (Sydney Morning Herald, 2010). This escalation of interference from the social world with no protection being offered either from the government or universities, prompted the students to form strong alliances with communal identities to push their agendas forward (Larana et al., 1994). In order to have their complaints heard the students formed status movements such as the Peace Rally in Melbourne on the 31st, May 2009. As previously mentioned in section 2.5 "Status movements are closely linked with identity issues [in which] the grievances are actuated by perceived threats to how one defends oneself" (Larana, Johnson, and Gusfield 1994, p. 23). The Peace Rally was a very clever political move. It was this collective identity which could affect communal resistance (He & Xue, 2014; Samuel, 2013; Sulka, 1995). This resistance though was by the collective identity of international students against the social world in which they resided. This in itself was not enough. It took some one to recognise the opportunity to use this resistance to affect change in the education field. As previously seen in Chapter 2, Bourdieu (1990) recognises that opportunities are infinite however, it is habitus which dictates how we deal with such opportunities.

> In fact, a given agent's practical relation to the future, which governs his present practice, is defined in the relationship between on the one hand, his Habitus with its temporal structures and dispositions towards the future, consisted in the course of a particular relationship to a particular universe of probabilities, and on the other hand a certain state of chances objectively offered to him by the social world. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 64)

In other words it took someone who know how to play roulette with all the yellow tokens (Bourdieu, 1993c, p. 34).

The plight of the students was picked up by news agencies around the world such as the India Times, Al Jazeera, and the BBC. International political and economic pressure was bought to bear on the Australian Government. It was when the economic power of the educational field became threatened by the political intervention of both the Indian and Australian governments that the students were able to make gains in this area.

> If one wants to go beyond preaching, then it is necessary to implement practically, by using the ordinary means of political action—creation of associations and movements, demonstrations, manifestoes, etc.—the Realpolitik of reason aimed at setting up or reinforcing, within the political field, the mechanisms capable of imposing the sanctions, as far as possible automatic ones, that would tend to discourage deviations from the democratic norm (such as the corruption of elected representatives) and to encourage or impose the appropriate behaviours; aimed also at favouring the setting up of non-distorted social structures of communication between the holders of power and the citizens, in particularly through a constant struggle for the independence of the media. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 126)

The students, led by the Federation of Indian Student Association in Australia, had utilised the media for great political advantage to not only bring the issue of violence to the world's attention but of the issue of the international students' unfair treatment at the hands of the universities.

The intersection of the educational fields the political fields and the social field of the wider community created a fracture. The violence against the student prompted a political reaction. This is so normal that it often goes without saying. Though in this case the political reaction to the social

field created a transformation in the education field where the dominant hegemony was usurped by a politically motivated change of rules. This created a fracture at the intersection of these three fields which the students, now as a dominant transformative force, were able to exploit.

**For me personally,** I watched students find a voice and stand their ground in a wonderful, non-violent display of solidarity. Unfortunately, as time moves on, I see history repeating itself. It is unlikely that there will be another Gitika there to play the chips, and so our habitus with its temporal connections and relationships will guide us to certain probabilities, not a future of unlimited possibilities.

The remaining question is: why did the various groups of students react differently? In fact, they all reacted as predictably as the game of roulette.

The students at Newgarth University were a mixture of international and domestic students in a domestic environment. There, the domestic environment was the dominant hegemony, but this was normalised by the students themselves. The international students assimilated into the domestic environment. Thus, the students not only accepted the rules of the game but modified their habitus to adapt to the new field.

The students at Partner A were also normalised to the game by Rose's intervention and leadership, although, by and large, their habitus was neither threatened nor required to be modified to any great extent. The students could recognise the game and only minor adjustments were required in order to participate. The predominantly Chinese students were also less likely to protest given that many had family in China and the horror of Tian'anmen Square were bought back to reality by the banning of social network sites in China.

The students from Partner B capitulated to symbolic violence in order preserve the integrity of the field and to achieve the academic standards negotiated by Sanjeev through his use of the economic power.

The students at Partner C in Melbourne and Partner D in Sydney reacted in a manner that the habitus of the dominant hegemony for this cohort demanded. They protested with a level of intensity that varied according to the power of the pressure they perceived was being used against them. They remonstrated in the streets to show a united front to discrimination and violence. It was the violence perpetrated against them which created the fracture in the field, allowing these protests to be so potent.

Partner C in Sydney showed almost the same reaction, though this was somewhat diluted and refocused. Just as Partner A had little to protest about, the strong pastoral care at Partner C in Sydney removed many of the actual difficulties experienced at the other partner institutions. There was only the perceived dominance of Newgarth to focus on. Thus, the protest in the streets was not an open revolt but one of gentle defiance or civil disobedience against an unseen master.

Partner D in Adelaide did not really protest, which was due in part to the distance of the students, both academically and geographically, and the compliance of Sitara.

Thus, it can be established that the students did nothing more than the actions which were natural for them to undertake and was perfectly predictable. The different groups of students had closed ranks and reacted – or not as the case may be – to the perceived attacks that threatened to prevent them from achieving their collective goals. The greatest threat appeared to come from the very institution that offered them the avenue to achieve those goals.

## 7.8 Conclusions

The original research for this thesis focused on things that are not talked about in blended learning: do students' cultural backgrounds affect the way they learn? The short reply to this statement is that in *this* specific case study, habitus, or at least Bourdieu's notion of habitus, had a substantial effect on this group of students' engagements with a specific online assessment task. Habitus, though, had little or no effect on the students' learning-style inventory. What I have demonstrated is that the students were eminently able to adapt their learning style to a different teaching technique. What created the obstacles to learning was not the students' self-identification with a culture, but a struggle for dominance of traditional academic values and business economic growth. It was the education system itself which created the resistance to its development and the online assessment.

The resistance to the online assessment task was not, as I had first suspected, a convergence of students with educational deficiencies in one place but, instead, a demonstration of communal resistance to symbolic violence. The students, when caught between disputing entities, were forced together as a group with a common purpose. The students created allegiances with each other in order to give weight to that common purpose. The allegiance group reverted to the cultural norms of the dominant hegemony and made their concerns known by protest, which is normal within that culture.

While this study targeted a single event that occurred in 2009, it has ongoing applications to the current education community. It is my current experience, working as I do across several institutions offering the contemporary version of the MPA that very little has changed. The same problems still exist of the students congregating in allegiance groups, resisting assessment practices, forcing the institutions to either fail students en masse or change the assessment criteria. Most of these institutional problems have resulted from the failure to engage the students with the concept that online materials are central to the learning philosophy of the course, the inexperience of the course coordinators, or the failure to acknowledge the allegiance groups formed by the students themselves.

# *Chapter 8*

# *Conclusion*

## 8.1 Introduction

This thesis is a story about what happened in the education system in Australia in 2009. Newgarth University does not exist other than in the pages of this thesis. I have used the public documents that were available to create a story around what a very small group of amazing people did. I have used that story to demonstrate that Bourdieu's theories have application to a profit-driven industry that is still very much in need of governmental direction. The events did happen, though not necessarily to me. The events are an amalgam of the stories of all the people I have spoken to over the past 10 years (students, staff, administrators and government watchdogs). This thesis is their story.

The title of this thesis is *10 Days in 2009: An Auto-ethnographical Study of "Communal Resistance" Taken by International Students in Australia."* The title reflects the context of the study. It is my personal reflection on a small event that happed in the not too distant past. In hindsight, I see now that my original views on this study were coloured to some extent by the reception I received when I first commenced employment in Australia. I was determined I would not buy into prejudicial theory and injustice. Now upon reflection, I see that much of my early actions were directed at attempting to prove that international students were as capable of higher education as anyone else. Sadly, I had mis-identified this early work as a precursor to the subject of this study. It was not. The very positive work I did in creating accessibility to academic materials in a manner that the students could linguistically and culturally understand had nothing to do with the later more spectacular events. What created the obstacles to learning was not the students' self-identification with a culture, but a struggle for dominance between the fields of Academia, with its traditional academic values and business economic growth and the Political field which was looking to maintain a billion-dollar industry while quietening civil unrest. The intersection of these fields created a rupture which a determined group of students identified and exploited politically. It was, in this one specific situation covered by this study, the education system itself that created the resistance to its development.

The resistance to the online assessment task was not, as I had first suspected, a convergence of students with educational deficiencies in one place. Instead, I found that the resistance was a demonstration against organised symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990). The students, when caught between two disputing entities, the fields, were forced together as a group of people allied with a common purpose. This allegiance group reverted to the cultural norms of the dominant hegemony, in this case a charismatic leader who was representative of the Indian student population. It was the Indian Students who appeared to have been targeted the worst and affected the most by the preceding events. The Melbourne Peace marchers had allied together. They as a group allied with the Federation of Indian Students Associations in Australia who created a recognisable identity with a recognisable manifesto. The students made their concerns known in a manner that was normal to that dominant culture, which was, in this case, by protest.

## 8.2 Empirical Findings

I had originally intended to use a mixed method data collection process that was based, mainly, on the empirical quantitative survey conducted at the partner institutions. I had intended that my personal observations over a period of years would triangulate this empirical data in order to strengthen the reliability of the findings and provide credibility. Over time the methodology evolved to an autoethnographic study of the group of students at the centre of the study. The main reason for this was the evolution of the study itself. At first, the survey was conducted on the premise that the majority of the students at the centre of the study had refused to undertake an assessment. Cross-referencing with the Blackboard-generated reports indicated that the students had failed to submit the assessment rather than having refused to undertake it.

Those students that failed to submit represented fewer than half of the total students for that teaching period. Those students that failed to submit generally studied at only two of the seven campuses that were part of this study. In a serendipitous turn of events, the returned survey papers from the Sydney campus of those students who failed to submit were lost in transit. Rather than being a death blow, the loss of the survey returns refocused the study into an autoethnographic narrative of my teaching over the period in question. I am convinced now that the use of my sketch of the WEBLEI would have identified little more than that there was a problem with the acceptance of the online assessment, which confirmed Skelton's (2009) findings that students will only engage with online material if they see it as integral to the unit.

The individual interviews with the student volunteers were designed to support that proposition. It was the loss of one group of students' survey papers that redirected me from looking at the students as individuals to looking at their actions collectively. A re-examination of all the collected data indicated that all the students in the study had acted in a series of allegiance groups. From this realisation, it was a relatively simple matter to overlay Bourdieu's theory of fields and habitus to explain the events of 2009.

## 8.3 Theoretical Implications

While this study targeted a single event that occurred in 2009, it has ongoing application to the current education community. It is my experience, both past and present, working as I do across several institutions offering the contemporary version of the MPA, that very little has changed since my introduction to the partner institutions in 2007. The same problem still occurs of students congregating in allegiance groups, resisting assessment practices, forcing the institutions to either fail students en masse, or, change the assessment criteria. Lecturers continue to be aggressively encouraged by their respective institutions to give passing grades to students who have simply refused to engage with the learning materials (Burton-Bradly, 2018).

Most of these institutional problems result from the failure to engage students with the concept that online materials are central to the learning philosophy of the respective units; the inexperience of course coordinators; or the failure to control the allegiance groups formed by the students themselves. In one institution I teach at that offers a Bachelor of Information Technology there is not one web cam available on any staff or student computer. This makes video conferencing almost an impossibility. I have, as a result of this research, created a successful course of study that starts from the perspective of the allegiance group. This is an area for further research.

## 8.4 Policy implications

The work for this research study was underpinned by Hara and Kling's (1999) study. Their work suggests that there are things in the Australian education of international students, via partner institutions, that are just not talked about. One of these is the use of electronic resources in blended learning. At the outset of this study, there was very little published about the use of online resources by International students when studying within Australia. The reason for this was that at the time international students were greatly discouraged from participating in online units due to their student visa requirements. Thus, the use of electronic resources, other than the generally standard LMS had not been greatly explored in relation to international students in a private institutional setting. It is hoped that this thesis will now remove the taboos around this topic and contribute to an emerging body of research that is similarly interested in examining the pedagogy utilised in teaching at such institutions.

In line with Skelton's (2009) findings, I would recommend that the cost of units be transparent and not transferred to the students by indirect means. By this I mean that the cost of a prescribed text should not be added to the unit costs as an additional separate expense. If a course coordinator requires that a text be prescribed, then that text should be included in the fee for the course. In most cases, this could be a minimal cost of some $40 for an online text. At worse, $200 or $300 for a publisher's pack of books (required only for use with open-book exams).

Including an electronic version of the text in the fees would indicate that it is integral to the study of a particular unit as well as it belonging to the student. By continuing the Australian custom of requiring students to buy texts in additional to the costs of their courses creates a perceptual conflict for the international students. It is perceived that the materials provided by the institution are integral, anything else is peripheral. Where materials are included on an LMS, major steps should be taken to ensure that these materials are central to the unit being undertaken and that this point is made abundantly clear to the students.

## 8.5 Recommendations for Future Research

My recommendations for future research take two distinct paths. The first is to continue investigating the use of fields as a method to direct students' perceptions in relation to working both online and in group work for existing higher education degrees. At present, from my personal experience, the traditional form that group work takes is to require students to work collaboratively on a given piece of assessable material. The effectiveness of this method should be evaluated against a situational-learning experience, where individual students are required to work with each other in a symbiotic relationship. This method can create a close resemblance to the actual requirements and dynamics that operate in a workplace.

The second path of research is to continue exploring the notion of the dominant being dominated by the domination, in particular its application to the education field.

## 8.6 Limitations of the Study

The study attempted to survey current students and immediately past students of a commercial law course in a Master of Professional Accounting degree. A longitudinal study was contemplated with a

comparison being drawn between a post- and pre-application using the interactive LMS Moodle. The limitations of this study were as follows:

- The majority of the students had English as their second other language.
- The students' grasp and understanding of English was often poor.
- There were many technical terms that the students did not understand. For example, there was confusion that social networking sites such as Facebook were accessed via the internet.
- One partner institution did not participate in the study.
- Due to the removal of the Likert scale, the results did not correspond directly with those studies incorporating the WEBLEI.
- The qualitative portion of the study was undertaken with only four students in one city and therefore was not a representative cross-section of the study.
- The study intended to change the LMS to Moodle and re-survey the students.
- The permission to use an online assessment during the Moodle trial was withdrawn by Newgarth University.
- Brief focus groups were conducted with the students who used Moodle, which were not included in the study.
- The final comparative survey did not take place.

## 8.7 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research were to identify

1. What went wrong? When looking at this question the research demonstrates that the refusal to take an online test by groups of students, was simply symptomatic of a larger systemic failure on the part of the Australian international student education system.
2. How can we understand what happened here? The intersections of the social, political and cultural fields, in a volatile circumstance created a fracture in the fields which was exploited by students who, though led by one very strong individual, communally created a recognisable identity with enough political power (national and internationally) to effect transformation in all three fields.
3. What does this mean for me personally? My feelings for the past 10 years are summed up in the following postscript.

## 8.8 Postscript.

The research study that is the subject of this thesis covered a period of 10 years that commenced with my first introduction to partner institution teaching at Newgarth University to the final submission of this thesis. The thesis itself has been written over a period of seven years of part-time study. Today, as I write this final postscript, I am on a train travelling from the coast where I now live and heading into the city to the very roots of where this study began. Ironically, from my office window in the city, I can see the building across the street where Partner C was situated in 2007. It has now long been gone from this city. Partner B is now situated on the floor above in the building which houses the university I now work for. Partner B is still delivering courses for Newgarth University.

The train I am on travels the length of a new regional rail line that was built specifically to handle the rapid expansion of the population in the western corridor. Almost a million new residents to the state settled in this area during the period of the study. As the train stops at one of the newly developed satellite towns, literally hundreds of people get on board. So many of these people were past students of mine. They say “hi”, smile at me or pat me on the shoulder as they pass. They no doubt have gained their coveted permanent residency.

Today I am giving my usual presentation to a new intake of students for orientation. They are a lovely bunch of people. I had lunch with them yesterday. I will have fun teaching them. They hail from Vietnam, India, Nepal, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and South America; most, if not all, are hoping to acquire permanent residency. However, these students will gain this by training as managers and leaders in a service-driven industry; one that they chose to participate in. I am very pleased to say that the university I now work for has a very different attitude to these students. The students have a common goal with that of the university.

The service industry has created the field (in Bourdieusian terms) that the students will learn and work in; it is the industry’s voice that is the dominant hegemony. The current crop of trainers and teachers will help the students to develop a new habitus which will enable them to flourish in this field. The hegemony, the field, the habitus and the goals are all aligned. The campus is a place of positive energy and broad smiles. The school in which I teach and the degrees I help deliver were instigated by the industry themselves and not from academia. The industry is innovative, forward thinking and expanding. Having good leaders who align the services one can offer with clients’ needs is a good way to progress in business. I often have coffee with the lecturers from Partner B. They say that their students don’t turn up to class, and they are failing in droves. There is always conflict. The lecturers say that the students are only interested in gaining their permanent residency, not in their education.

Sadly, after 10 years, it appears that some things just haven’t changed.

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# *Appendices*

## Appendix A – Survey Form

### Questions relating to the use of Blackboard as an electronic student learning platform. New Class Questionnaire

In order to assess the value or otherwise of the use of Blackboard as a platform for the dissemination of educational material in [redacted], we would greatly value your feedback. There is no need to put your name or any personal information on the questionnaire if you do not want to as it is not crucial to this research. Involvement is voluntary, and you are entitled to withdraw from the questionnaire at any point. Non-participation will not adversely affect the relationship of any student with the [redacted] in anyway at all. Results of this research will be published and made available to view. Students will be notified of this when the research is finalised and published. This research has been approved by the [redacted] Ethics Committee approval number B09-118

**Demographic questions.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Please indicate your age range; circle the most appropriate | 18–20<br>20–25<br>25–30 | 30–40<br>40–50<br>50–60 |
| Please indicate your gender | Male | Female |
| Are you an international student? Please mark the box with an X | ☐ Yes | ☐ No |
| What ethnic group do you identify with? | | |
| Do you have part-time or full-time employment?<br>If yes, how many hours approximately do you work? | ☐ Yes | ☐ No |
| What previous computer experience have you had? For example, World Wide Web, or computer science degree? | | |
| Do you have access to the internet at home? | ☐ Yes | ☐ No |

**Questions relating to Blackboard and its usage**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Are you aware that Blackboard is available to you as an [NU] student? | ☐ Yes | ☐ No |
| Please indicate at what point in your course you were first aware that Blackboard was available to you as an [NU] student? | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| At the time you first used Blackboard, please state for what reason you used it? | | |
| At your campus was an “intranet” available such as “I drive”? | ☐ Yes | ☐ No |
| Did you prefer to use your intranet to Blackboard | ☐ Yes | ☐ No |
| How does Blackboard compare with the “usability” of the “Intranet”? | | |
| Have you experienced difficulties accessing Blackboard? | ☐ Yes | ☐ No |
| If you answered yes to the question above, what were these difficulties? | | |
| Name three functions you expected Blackboard to perform. For example, provide basic course material.<br>1<br>2<br>3 | | |
| Name three requirements you feel Blackboard should contain as a learning tool. For example, interactive quizzes to test your progress, or your grade progress through the course.<br>1<br>2<br>3 | | |
| If “podcast” or “video-cast” lectures were available to you on Blackboard, would you use them? | ☐ Yes | ☐ No |
| How could the [redacted] improve the use of Blackboard for you? | | |
| Would you attend a class on the use of Blackboard if available? | ☐ Yes | ☐ No |
| Would you like to participate in a further interview to complete this research? | ☐ Yes | ☐ No |
| If yes, please provide your name and email address so that we may contact you. | | |

## Appendix B – Demographic Characteristics and Summary

Table B1

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Teaching Period 1 2009*

| Students | Male | Female | No Return | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | | | | |
| 18–20 | 3 | 3 | – | 6 |
| 20–25 | 46 | 33 | – | 81 |
| 25–30 | 35 | 28 | – | 68 |
| 30–35 | 12 | 7 | – | 19 |
| No reply | – | – | 12 | 12 |
| Total | 96 | 71 | 12 | 179 |
| | | | | |
| International students | 102 | 68 | 9 | 179 |
| | | | | |
| Ethnicity | | | | |
| Indian | 19 | 12 | – | 31 |
| Asian | 4 | 10 | – | 14 |
| Nepalese | 4 | 3 | – | 7 |
| Bangladeshi | – | 1 | – | 1 |
| Chinese | – | 5 | – | 5 |
| Other | 3 | 4 | – | 7 |
| No reply | – | – | 114 | 114 |
| Total | 30 | 35 | 114 | 179 |
| | | | | |
| Hours worked | | | | |
| Not working | 27 | 26 | – | 53 |
| Working (unspecific) | 13 | 4 | – | 17 |
| Part time | 48 | 37 | – | 85 |
| Full time | 4 | 2 | – | 6 |
| No reply | | | 18 | 18 |
| Total | | | | 179 |
| | | | | |
| Previous computer experience | | | | |
| Computer science degree | 24 | 6 | – | 30 |
| Basic WWW | 45 | 26 | – | 71 |
| Basic computer knowledge | 1 | 2 | – | 3 |
| No reply | | | 75 | 75 |
| Total | | | | 179 |

| Students | Male | Female | No Return | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Internet access at home | | | | |
| Yes | 93 | 66 | – | 159 |
| No | 9 | 5 | – | 14 |
| No reply | | | 6 | 6 |
| Total | | | – | 179 |

The students from for Teaching Period 1 2009 were those who demonstrated problems with the online assessment. Five other yes/no questions were added to the demographic questions for this group to determine the students' awareness of the computing environment at the partner campus and the functionality of the LMS in the course they were taking.

Table B2

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Teaching Period 1 2009 – Additional Questions*

| Students | Male | Female | No Return | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Does your campus have an intranet? | | | | |
| Yes | 82 | 56 | – | 138 |
| No | 14 | 12 | – | 26 |
| No reply | – | – | 15 | 15 |
| Total | 96 | 68 | 15 | 179 |
| Do you prefer the intranet to Blackboard? | | | | |
| Yes | 51 | 36 | – | 87 |
| No | 24 | 45 | – | 69 |
| No reply | – | – | 23 | 23 |
| Total | 75 | 81 | 23 | 179 |
| Did you have difficulties accessing Blackboard? | | | | |
| Yes | 42 | 26 | – | 66 |
| No | 42 | 31 | – | 73 |
| No reply | – | – | 40 | 40 |
| Total | 84 | 57 | 40 | 179 |
| Was Blackboard a good tool? | | | | |
| Yes | 61 | 41 | – | 102 |
| No | 19 | 20 | – | 39 |
| No reply | – | – | 38 | 38 |

| Students | Male | Female | No Return | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 80 | 61 | 38 | 179 |
| Would podcasting of lectures have been beneficial? | | | | |
| Yes | 51 | 31 | – | 82 |
| No | 29 | 25 | – | 54 |
| No reply | – | – | 43 | 43 |
| Total | 80 | 56 | 43 | 179 |

For Teaching Period 1 2009, the conclusions drawn from the actual survey results of the 11 questions asked are as follows.

- Of those who replied, all participants recognised themselves as international students.
- Fewer than 10% of respondents disclosed which ethnic group they identified with. Of those who did, Asian was the predominant ethnic group.
- The ratio of male to female was 3:2.
- 65% of students worked 15 hours a week or more, with the concentration being in Sydney.
- Approximately 103 had any computer experience above the use of the internet.
- Approximately 90% of students had access to and used the internet at home.
- 26 student claimed that their campus did not have an intranet
- Of the returned forms, the following initial facts were determined:
  - 50% of students found that Blackboard was a valuable tool.
  - 65% of students had "login" problems.
  - 100% of the respondents claimed they had logged on to Blackboard for the first time in the commercial law course.
  - 118 students (66%) logged on to Blackboard for the first time to undertake the assessment.
  - 53% of students preferred the partner institution's I drive "intranet" to Blackboard.

The demographics of the students revealed that:

Table B3

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Teaching Period 2 2009*

| Students | Male | Female | No Return | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | | | | |
| 18–20 | – | – | – | – |
| 20–25 | 40 | 35 | 1 | 76 |
| 25–30 | 23 | 22 | 1 | 46 |
| 30–40 | 4 | 5 | – | 9 |
| 40–50 | 2 | – | – | 2 |
| No reply | – | – | 2 | 135 |
| International Students | 69 | 62 | 4 | 135 |
| Ethnicity | | | | |
| Indian | 12 | 16 | – | 28 |
| Asian | 8 | 3 | – | 11 |
| Nepalese | 1 | – | – | 1 |
| Bangladeshi | – | – | – | – |
| Chinese | – | – | – | – |
| Other | – | – | – | – |
| No reply | – | – | 95 | 95 |
| Total | 21 | 19 | 95 | 135 |
| Hours worked | | | | |
| Not working | 39 | 42 | – | 81 |
| Working (unspecific) | - | - | – | - |
| Part time | 8 | 2 | – | 10 |
| Full time | 23 | 15 | – | 38 |
| No reply | – | – | 6 | 6 |
| Total | | | | 135 |
| Previous computer experience | | | | |
| Computer science degree | 14 | 4 | – | 18 |

| Students | Male | Female | No Return | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Basic WWW | 27 | 29 | – | 56 |
| Basic computer knowledge | – | – | – | – |
| No reply | | | 61 | 61 |
| Total | 41 | 33 | 61 | 135 |
| | | | | |
| Internet access at home | | | | |
| Yes | 62 | 50 | – | 112 |
| No | 9 | 10 | – | 19 |
| No reply | – | – | 4 | 4 |
| Total | 71 | 60 | 4 | 135 |

For Teaching Period 2 2009, the conclusions drawn from the actual survey results of the six questions asked are as follows.

- Of those who replied, all participants recognised themselves as international students.
- 35% disclosed which ethnic group they identified with. Of those who did, Indian was the predominant ethnic group.
- Ratio of male to female was almost 50:50.
- 60% of students were not working.
- 27% worked full time, with the majority of those being in Melbourne.
- Approximately 76 or 56% had any computer experience above use of the internet.
- Approximately 86% of students had access to and used the internet at home.
- Of the returned forms, the following initial facts have been determined:
  - 84% of students found that Blackboard was a valuable tool.
  - 35% of students had "login" problems.
  - 86% of respondents claimed they had logged on to Blackboard for the first time in the commercial law course.
  - (40.7%) of all students logged on to Blackboard for the first time to undertake the assessment.

- 91.85% of students preferred the partner institution's I drive "intranet" to Blackboard.

## Appendix C – Episodic Interview Sheets

**Phase 1: Introducing the interview principle**

*This interview will consist of four parts. First the housekeeping. Then the interview.*

*I will ask you if you have read and understood the consent form. If you have, could you sign it please.*

*I will now ask some general contextual questions about you and your background*

***Example of interview sheet[21]***

Contextual information about the interview and the interviewee

- Date of the interview:
- Place of the interview:
- Duration of the interview:
- Interviewer:
- Indicator for identifying the interviewee:
- The interviewee's gender:
- Age of the interviewee:
- The interviewee's course:
- Undergraduate qualification:
- Duration of previous education/schooling:
- Previous Professional field:
- Raised (countryside/city):
- Lived with whom there? For example, parents, husband, wife, siblings:

[21] U. Flick. *The Episodic Interview; Small scale narratives as approach to relative experiences.* Discussion Paper. London School of Economics Methodology Institute. London. October 1996.p 12. http://www2.lse.ac.uk/methodologyInstitute/pdf/QualPapers/Flick-episodic.pdf accessed 16/03/2010.

- Number of siblings:
- Age of the siblings:
- Age of parents:
- Peculiarities of the interview:

**Phase 2: Introducing the interview principle**

*This interview will consist of three parts. In this interview, I will ask you repeatedly to recount situations which relate to your personal experiences with education.*

**Phase 2: The interviewee's concept of the issue and his/her biography in relation to the issue**

- *What does education mean for you? Or what do you associate with the word education?*
- *When you look back, what was your first experience with education? Could you please tell me about this situation?*
- *What was your experience of high school?*
- *What was your experience of college?*
- *What do you link today to the word "technology?*
- *What was your most relevant experience or contact with technology in education? Could you please tell me about that situation?*
- *There are times, when we feel education is more relevant than in other times. Could you please tell me about a situation, in which you felt this way?*

**Phase 3: The meaning of the issue for the interviewee's everyday life**

- *Remember what you associate with the word education. Could you tell me your first association with your family and education?*

- *Could you please recount how you viewed the relationship between education and your family when you were at high school?*
- *Could you please recount how your day yesterday went off and where and when some part of your education played a part in it?*
- *If you look at your life, do you have the impression, that education today play a bigger role in it than it did before? Could you please recount a situation for me in which education takes more room than it did before?*
- *If you look at your household, what role does technology play in it? Could you please tell me about a situation which is typical for that?.*
- *If you think of employment, which role does education play in this context for you? Please tell me about a situation typical for that*.
- *If you think of employment, which role does technology play in this context for you? Please tell me about a situation typical for that*.

**Phase 4: Focusing the central parts of the issue under study**

- *What do you link today to the phrase "social network sites"?*
- *What do you link today to the word "computer"? Which devices do you count among computers?*
- *What do you link today to the word internet? Which devices do you count among those that connect to the internet?*
- *If you look back, what was your first encounter with a computer? Could you please recount that situation for me?*
- *If you look back, what was your first encounter with a computer in education? Could you please recount that situation for me?*
- *If you think of your relationship with friends and family, which role does technology play in this context for you? Please tell me about a situation typical for that.*

- *Do you avoid situations which require learning to use complicated technology? Please recount a situation in which you avoided using some equipment.*
- *Do you avoid situations which require learning new concepts? Please recount a situation in which you avoided applying a new education concept.*
- *What do you do, if you don't know how to use new technology such as a new mobile phone? Please recount a typical situation for that.*

**Phase 5: More general topics referring to the issue under study**

- *In your opinion, who should be responsible for your education? Who is able to or should take the responsibility, or should take it?*
- *In your opinion, who should be responsible for change in education due to technology? Who is able to take the responsibility, or should take it?*
- *Which developments do you expect in the area of the use of computers in education in the near future? Please imagine and tell me a situation, which would make this evolution clear for me.*

**Phase 6: Evaluation and small talk**

The final part of the interview is devoted to its evaluation by the interviewee.

- *What was missing in the interview to mention your point of view?*
- *Was there anything bothering for you during the interview?*

Like in other interviews, it seems fruitful to add a period of small talk, which allows the interviewee to talk about relevant topics outside the explicit interview framework

For example, "What I forgot to mention..."; "What I actually wanted to say..."; "My wife had a funny experience. I don't know, if this fits in your study, but..."

**Phase 7: Ending the interview and validity triangulation**

- *Thank you for participation in this interview(s). What I would like to do now is have this recording transcribed.*

- *I will then contact you again and ask you to verify that this was what occurred. I would also like you to reflect on the transcription; and then, on another sheet of paper, add anything else which you feel is significant that has been omitted.*
- *I have set up a Moodle website. On this site you will be able to see the progress of this study.*
- *Of course, there will be no information available on this site which will be able to identify you or any other participant.*